



THE SON OF PERDITION

—those that thou gavest me I have kept,
and none of them is lost, but the son of
perdition.—*St. John 17: 12.*

JAMES GOULD COZZENS

THE SON
OF
PERDITION

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FOR SYLVIA

*Outliving her beauty's outward, with a mind
That doth renew swifter than blood decays.*

The United Sugar Company.

The United Trading Company, The Bank of the United Sugar Company, United Sugar Shipping Corporation, United-National Refineries ("Snowflake Sugar").

New York, New Orleans, Habana, London, Bordeaux.

Take a map of Cuba. At the 77th meridian, draw a diagonal line from sea to sea. East, is the province of Oriente. In Oriente, four United Sugar mills. At the 79th, draw a second line. Between the two, Camagüey. In Camagüey, eleven United Sugar mills. Near the 81st, draw again. Santa Clara province.

In Santa Clara province, the two newest, largest, United Sugar mills.

Central Chicago. Central Espalada.

On the Caribbean coast, east of Trinidad de Cuba; Dosfuegos, S. C. Sea terminal of the Company's railroads. Deep-water port of the United Sugar Shipping Corporation. Private freight service to New Orleans, to England, to the Continent.

At Dosfuegos: wharves, warehouses, machine shops, railroad yards, and the original fishing

village. Through Dosfuegos move four hundred and fifty thousand tons of United sugar yearly.

Resident at Central Chicago, in charge of United Sugar's Santa Clara unit—these great new centrales, Chicago and Espalada, and the sea terminal at Dosfuegos—Chief of Cuban Operations and Administrator General, Joel B. Stellow.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	MONO PASMADO	3
II	CARIBBEAN IDYL	41
III	AGUARDIENTE	100
IV	NOT ISCARIOT	156
V	U. S. C.	213
VI	TWILIGHT OF THE MACHINES	274

THE SON OF
PERDITION

I

MONO PASMADO

PEPE RIJO ran.

After him, traveling swiftly, reached the sun. Clouds breaking let one intense shaft fall, stabbing directly into a world warm and gray, still dripping from last night's long rain. With the unearthly accuracy of chance this prodigious radiant finger touched Pepe Rijo, poured over him like a focused spotlight. He beheld his little black shadow bounding grotesquely before him on the boards of the footway. He stopped short, shaking, made suddenly aware that people might see him. He faced about in a fresh panic of apprehension.

All the way down to the iron fence and big gates of the railroad yards the wet sandy street was empty. Fresh columns of sunlight slanted violently to the vast red roof of the deep-water pier. Thin moisture which lay over the forty foot white letters spelling *United* vanished while Pepe Rijo looked. Dank sides of unpainted houses nearer at hand steamed. Over the top of the Marine

Office a limp Cuban flag shook itself loose, almost lifted in the last breath of the sea wind on Dosfuegos.

Pepe Rijo pulled himself together. It was a process so literal that a distinct order came out of the twisted confusion of body which made his haste a form of scurrying. His shoulders stood back stiffly. Stiffly his feet hit on the planks. He rubbed his hands together. His mouth compressed, twitched, letting through his tongue to moisten his dry lips. He came to his house and pushed the door open.

He was not sure whether he wished his wife Agueda, to be there or not. He did not want to be alone any more, but as soon as he saw her he did not want to be with her either. He held his eyes straight front, he advanced in trembling parody of his habitual important strut, not speaking to her, not looking at her, as she turned by the stove. He reached the dirty little table in the corner covered with a mess of official papers, Company orders, blue forms. He sat down hard in a cowhide chair, seized handful of these, rattling them loudly. None of them was important. They were duplicates. He never saw the originals which went into the neat files of the Company.

The one on top he tried to read, to fill his mind

with it, but the very complications threw him off. It was the blue form of a special order. Transportation order. *FINDLEY, Oliver*. The American who had come down last night. He thrust a hand into a box and dragged out a battered cardboard file. He opened it and thumbed down the dirty tabs until he came to *F*. He crammed the paper in, put the box back, seized more papers, not wishing to see whether Agueda were looking at him. It was useless to try to read them, but he held them up, staring over their tops at the calendar. He scowled and moved his lips as though he were reading the papers, for he knew Agueda had turned. "Saturday, One June," he read soundlessly, "Saturday, One June. Saturday, One June." He scowled more and seized more papers. "Saturday, One June," he pronounced, noiseless.

"Well," said Agueda, "what is it?"

"Can't you see I'm busy?" shrilled Pepe. "Mr. Stellow is coming down on train number 9."

"Well," she asked, "what of that?"

Even in his distress and confusion, it was to Pepe a daring thing to say. On him, too, was the great label, *United*. As Alcalde of Dosfuegos, he felt, unprotesting, like the Company's property. He would never have been Alcalde had Mr.

Stellow wanted somebody else for mayor, chief man. Without any explanation, the Administrator General put a hand under Pepe, lifted him above every one else at the sea terminal. If, like the freight cars, the locomotives, the very sugar bags, Pepe had been obliged to wear the U.S.C.—property of the United Sugar Company for all to look at, it could be only a decoration.

“You are a fool,” he said to his wife. Then, as though the violent words cut him off, left him alone and afraid, he added, “Agueda.”

She would not be annoyed with him. In the first place, women were not annoyed with their husbands in Dosfuegos. Much more irritatingly, Agueda humoured him—*da gusto*, gave agreement. She was transparently indifferent to what he said, intent only on what he might tell her suitable for transference along the back fences. The implication that his troubles were of no importance usually insulted him into telling them, pouring them out angrily.

He felt again the tormenting temptation to speak, but he clamped his jaws on it. Mr. Stellow would come. Impossible to guess what the Administrator would do. Pepe would not even try to guess. He writhed in a terror so exquisite that no orderly thought was possible. He saw

the United Sugar Company materialized like one of its great oil-burning locomotives, tall as ten horses, rushing down on him. The Administrator rode it like God. It roared faster and faster, higher and higher. Pepe struggled and squirmed, prayed and screamed but he could not pull himself out of the track. It was the ultimate horror. His innocence seemed to him of no avail. His mind raced up and down and everywhere a wall marked U.S.C. confronted him. Mounting in hysteria, this agony of fresh fear seemed suddenly to balance the earlier horror from which he had run home. Terror hitting terror, hung, swung even and there was an appalling calm. He saw the Administrator saying to him, "Have you been talking?" Out of the quiet of the vacuum he heard himself saying, "No, señor." That was something. He could say that.

His shirt was sticking to his back. He wiped the sweat off his forehead. He opened his mouth and said to Agueda, "It has stopped raining."

Fourteen years ago at Sancti Spíritus, Pepe Rijo, drunk as mortal man is allowed to get, was assisted by fascinated friends into the office of the National Lottery and cashed half a ticket.

He had won.

Thousands on thousands of engraved sheets were sold. Infallible systems, decimal calculations, sorcery, pure mathematics, had gone into other men's buying. Government officials and relatives of the President of the Republic, privily informed, had taken their pick of numbers. Yet something must have gone wrong, for half the first prize fell to Pepe Rijo of Dosfuegos.

Pepe, rich suddenly, was not wise and never had been. Small, dark, his countenance resembled undeniably a surprised monkey—*mono pasmado*—an inspired phrase flung at him when he was a child by a humorist from Habana peddling aluminum pots. It pleased Pepe's contemporaries very much. Pepe became known as *pasmado*. By degrees, as merely Mado, which clung long after people had forgotten the origin of the nickname. Pepe Rijo never forgot, though. It could make his small face darker with anger twenty years later. Even after he was Alcalde, Osmundo Monaga used to call him cheerfully, "Mado Rijo."

He was a fool.

A large part of his money he spent, God knew how, before he had sobered down and returned to Dosfuegos. With what remained, Pepe

bought a good house—one of the four or five such in Dosfuegos—at the end of town, and married Agueda. Probably she only married him because he was reputed to retain from the lucky ticket much more than he did. You could not, and neither could Pepe Rijo, behind his small dark face, think of other reasons for any one marrying him.

Agueda was large, plain, and philosophical. If she found herself deceived in regard to Pepe's fortune, pride made her conceal the fact, as she concealed all facts about herself, from her friends. She was rewarded eventually by her husband's elevation to Alcalde. Her philosophy went far enough for her to realize that Pepe was made Alcalde because he was too simple to offer any obstacle to Mr. Stellow of Central Chicago. Otherwise any one could see that it would have been Vidal Monaga, with whom the Administrator had been friendly for years. Vidal Monaga had always been head man by tacit consent until the village ceased to exist except at the sea terminal for the Company's sugar. The Company had swallowed them all up, and Mr. Stellow would never have insulted his friend by offering him the husk of authority on which poor Pepe fattened.

Pepe put on his authority as a child puts on a

fantastic, extravagant hat. There was no reason to suppose that Agueda felt the heart-twisting pathos of Pepe Rijo with the empty accouterments of office piled on his wizened shoulders. It would be hard to know what Agueda thought or felt. Her face was designed for secrets. You might conclude that she understood nothing, thought nothing, felt nothing.

Pepe Rijo knew better. Sitting there still, with the litter of useless, meaningless papers before him, still repeating in his stunned head, *Saturday, One June, Saturday, One June*, Pepe knew that it was only about herself that Agueda was secretive. Everything else flowed from her tireless tongue. A flash of the restless eyes and a torrent of words. No, you could not tell her anything—at least, nothing like the matter of Vidal Monaga and his son, Osmundo.

Pepe did not know whether he could bear not talking about it, whether his little skull would not crack with the awful swelling of consternation.

“Osmundo Monaga is not much good,” he said.

“Why do you think of that?” Agueda asked. She was cooking and her face, sweaty and broad, went up from the iron pots on the open fire.

"There is no reason for me to think of that," said Pepe. To hear her speaking supported him. "I simply thought it," he said. "He is an idler."

"If building boats is idling," observed Agueda, adding salt casually, "I am very much astonished."

Pasmada—Pepe looked at her with a furtive suspicion. His daily life, familiar, comforting, was rushing back to fill the void in him. He brooded silently. "Neither is Nida Monaga any good," he said. "I do not believe old Monaga is any better."

"Well, now what is the trouble?" she asked, holding a wooden spoon motionless.

"Why should anything be the trouble?" inquired Pepe savagely. He stood up. "In my own house I do not wish to be contradicted," he announced.

That was all, though. Another man might have struck her, asserted himself. No better reason was needed, but Pepe's instincts were all against striking people.

"I did not contradict you," she said.

"I did not say you contradicted me," he asserted. "I meant I do not care to have the Monagas discussed in my house."

She gazed at him, wide-eyed.

"You need not look like an idiot," he declared.

"People like the Monagas—well, we do not have to talk about them."

"You mean Nida Monaga," she decided. "Well, Nida Monaga is a wicked girl."

Pepe Rijo's face reddened. "And what do you know about wickedness?" he cried. "When a man returns to his home, he wishes to speak of something besides wickedness!"

"Nida Monaga," said his wife, unmoved, "is very bad. Every night a new man." She allowed herself the luxury of thinking a moment about having a new man every night. She said generously, "Possibly she is possessed of the devil. She goes about with that witch, Cuchita, enough."

"Well, you need not worry about that," snapped Pepe, recalling in agitation a minor event, long ago lost in the Monaga matter. "Cuchita died last night, so there!"

Agueda crossed herself. "The devil came for her," she said confidently. "I am glad. She has been a curse on all of us."

Pepe did not know whether he believed this or not. Usually when it was daylight and he felt well he had no faith in black magic. At other times he might have persuaded himself enough to assist in running a witch out of town, had not the

Company forbidden people to deal with Cuchita as witches should be dealt with. At the moment he was angered because he had given Agueda information, even though the giving of it kept him talking, heartened him, put Vidal Monaga out of mind, almost put the Company out of mind.

He said, "Well, your Fray Alejandro baptized her before she died, so chew that, if you believe in your devil snatching." That was still more information, so his healthy rage rose in proportion.

"And why do you wish to slander Nida Monaga?" he added, sitting down. He was bound there, he knew; girded and carried whither he would not. "Why do you wish to slander the Monagas? That is what I want to know! I say that Osmundo was an idler. You at once begin to talk of Nida. Why?"

"What do you mean, Osmundo *was* an idler?"

"Well, why shouldn't I say that?"

"Well, why 'was'?"

"You are a fool," cried Pepe violently. "Is! Always will be!"

She stirred the pot in silence. "Wasn't Mr. Stellow coming down to-day anyway?" she asked.

"What do you mean, anyway?"

"I mean if nothing else had happened."

"Well, what has happened?" he screamed at her.

"I thought it might be the man who came down last night."

"Findley?"

"I suppose so."

"Why should I think of him?"

"He is an American."

"Listen, fool," begged Pepe Rijo. "He is not worth a thought. Don't you think I have my report? Don't you think I was just reading it? Well, he was sent down from Central Chicago! He is a tramp—vagabundo! At all centrales, when they appear, they are given transportation. He will leave on the sugar boat to-morrow!"

"He slept with Nida Monaga last night," said his wife.

"A thousand furies take Nida Monaga!" cried Pepe Rijo. "Why is that of importance to me?"

"I did not say it was of importance to you. I said it was so."

"Well, and then?"

"Fray Alejandro wishes to save Nida Monaga."

"Mother of God, can I help what your Fray Alejandro wishes?"

Agueda crossed herself composedly. "He is a good man," she said. "I do not know why you must invoke Blessed Mary, Ever-Virgin, for him. Better invoke Nuestra Señora for wicked men. Osmundo Monaga, perhaps."

"Much good would She do him," said Pepe Rijo nervously. "Why must you always be talking of the Monagas? Is it to anger me?"

"Our Blessed Lady," said Agueda serenely, "would do every creature on earth much good. Mercy! Compassion! Pity for erring men!"

"Women, then, do not err?"

"I have said," pointed out Agueda, "that Nida Monaga erred very much. Unless you have passed a law that it is not wicked for unmarried girls to sleep with men."

"Why do you ask me? Ask Fray Alejandro, of whom you think so much!"

"I have asked him a great many things," said Agueda. "I have asked him if people who blaspheme and refuse confession and stay away from Mass may ever be saved. He has told me that by prayer and intercession they may see the light."

"So! You wish to insult me! You wish to say—"

"I did not speak of you, Pepe."

"I know who you mean!"

"If you know who I mean, and care at all, you could go to Fray Alejandro. Possibly you would tell him what you do not wish to tell me."

"What is there that I do not wish to tell you?"

"Something about these Monagas."

Pepe Rijo doubled his tight brown fist. He looked at the corner of Agueda's wide jaw and standing straight, he hit her as hard as he could, heaving his small shoulders behind it.

By a miracle it was right. The wooden spoon fell out of her hand and she slid, crumpling in front of the stove.

"And now be silent!" he said.

She did not move, so he turned about and went into the steaming street, the loose door banging behind him.

"I," said he, striking his thin chest, "I alone know what I will do."

A tide of confidence, based on so small a success as the silencing of Agueda, made him warm, almost at ease. The intoxicating triumph of it giddied him a little. Even though he did not, and no amount of saying so would make him, know what he was going to do, he continued

to move, his chest thrust out under his simian chin.

Without entirely conscious direction, he turned toward the café. In his thought flashed up a narrow brown face, seen for a moment in the earlier rain as it passed down from the Monaga house. That American, Findley, looked like some one. His confusion was half the ecstasy of his victory over Agueda. He stood still, lost in the comforting confidence and nothing could touch him. Ideas went harmless around his head. What Agueda had said of Findley and Nida. Horrible flashes about Vidal and Osmundo. Cuchita, that witch, dead in her little hut with her magic things around her. Through all stood out the thin face of the American. Pepe studied it, calm, undisturbed.

He knew then, with a clearing flash. One quick shudder, but it was not fear so much as an ecstatic positiveness. The American's face was like the face of Satan shown, quelled by Michael and his angels, in a chapel in the Sancti Spíritus church. Findley! Out of the turmoil in Pepe Rijo's mind jumped the thought that Agueda might have traffic with Fray Alejandro's God, but for him there remained at least the devil. He clutched his little chin. Then he beat himself on

the chest and walked. He thought; you must tell God, but the devil knows without asking.

• 2 •

TO Pepe Rijo it was disconcerting that he should meet Fray Alejandro before he could find Findley.

The sun was out now, clear and intense, with no cloud anywhere, though to the northwest the mountains of La Gloria were still vague and mistily blue. The priest looked Pepe in the face and said that it was a nice morning. In his momentary embarrassment, Pepe agreed, though he had not noticed it.

Fray Alejandro was an enormous man. His dirty feet, straining out of sandals, were huge. As he shifted his weight the old planks of the narrow footway running along the line of houses creaked. The heavy, coarse habit of the Franciscans made Fray Alejandro sweat. Moisture trickled shining on his broad face, not shaved to-day, sagging under a stubble of hard hair. Bright beads of sweat were caught in his tangled eyebrows. Deep

under them weary eyes, puffy below, a little blood-shot, went out as though from ambush toward the blue mountains, returned and rested calmly on Pepe Rijo. The priest's wide lips were parted and he panted slightly.

Plainly the death of Cuchita had kept him up all night. But even that exhaustion could not make him take the shady side of the miserable wet sand street. Fray Alejandro unostentatiously mortified his mountain of flesh by walking always in the sun. His tonsured head was constantly burned, peeling a little. The pain of it kept him awake at night. This, he considered salutary, giving additional opportunity for prayer and meditation.

"I am looking for Mr. Findley," Pepe Rijo said. He could not remain easy under Fray Alejandro's calm stare. He straightened his small figure belligerently, seeking an opposition, an immediate distraction.

"You will find him at the café, if you mean the new American," said the priest.

"Thank you," said Pepe nervously. "Adiós."

The priest nodded and moved on, those rotten planks quivering under his sandals. Pepe, alone at the corner, felt his exaltation weaken in a sense of desertion. The shabby brown back withdrew

steadily and left him, as if he had fallen overboard from a moving boat. Pepe was immediately tempted with panic; a desire to run after Fray Alejandro, to stay with him.

Fray Alejandro turned in at the Monagas' house. The loose sleeve of his robe fell back from his thick arm and he signed a casual cross on the door post. He was out of sight.

Pepe clasped his hands together. No one there! He almost shouted it. He himself had locked a door on Vidal Monaga. Osmundo? Yes, one might ask where Osmundo was! Nida, of course. She might be there. The priest was probably going to see Nida. What for?

He might look into that.

The frail, ludicrous notion that Fray Alejandro might be on some errand quite apart from religion came. It was enough to rescue him from the panic almost reawakened. What would the priest and that girl be up to in the empty house? He found himself walking rapidly past the backs of the buildings, along the curve of the flat green estuary where the river, after desolate wandering through the swamps, found the sea beside Dosfuegos. Boats were there, at little wharves that stank of fish. Nets dried, hung irregularly from post to post. A gasoline motor wheezed, failed, was

whirled again patiently, and broke into a lame putt-putt. Two men were rigging a big faded blue sail. Beyond were more boats; boats propped up on the shore—the very boat Osmundo Monaga was then working on, its unfinished hull gaping at the end. There was even, Pepe Rijo saw, an old coat of Osmundo's, limp from being rained on, lying on the partly completed deck. Pepe shuddered. He looked about him quickly and stepped into the boarded enclosure behind the Monaga house.

It was burning hot in that bare little open space. A wide, barn-like door showed the back room, used for a kitchen. Pepe Rijo stood still and wondered now. That man who had come from Habana with the aluminum pots so long ago had perhaps seen with conclusive perception. *Mono pasmado*. The thoughtless, defensive instincts of an animal, harassed, had brought him down here. Now he paused, filled with blank furtiveness, taken un-awares by thought. The small sluices of a complicated emotional life, tampered with too often this morning, opened weakly, drowning him with the deep waters of superstition, sinister lore, petty and unreasonable cautions which a puerile mind picked from insecurely grasped experience.

Against the necessity to know—lest room be

left for other knowledge—what business Fray Alejandro had with Nida Monaga clashed the conviction that the house was cursed, that disaster dwelt there, awaiting any incursion. The first was stronger. An eating need, brother now to the fascination of dreadful things, pushed him. That necessity of looking, and looking again, cringing away in horror, and yet once more looking, grasped him tight.

Pepe was in the shadow. He had stood so long in the intense light of the open space that the obscurity seemed preternatural. Dusky cobwebs laid one on another in appalling thickness. He made a stupid gesture with his hand, moving as though a false step would drop him in a pit. Still more obscure, a narrow passage faced him, but there was light at the end where a thin hanging concealed a room with windows. The illusion of the cobwebs passed. He came close to the hanging, supporting himself unsteadily against the wall.

A low sound. Pepe drew back at once with a quick contraction of alarm. It was some one breathing with difficulty, almost strangling. He was too unnerved for a moment to think of any way such a sound could be produced except by fingers locking murderously on a throat. Relief and comfort came to him when he realized that it

was a choking on sobs, a thick sound of acute distress stifled. Out of it rose like a rock the rumble of Fray Alejandro's voice. Like a rock, it was something to lean on, but like a rock, too, it was hard, relentless. Asking a question, Pepe recognized. Repeating it. Again and again. Even; like the blows of a heavy hammer.

No human being could stand that. At least no human being in Pepe's conception of human. Even there, not hearing clearly, he winced vicariously, the smash of the questions echoing as though directed against himself.

Pepe felt an unexpected, sweeping kinship with people pressed and persecuted. He put aside the curtain brusquely and said, "Señor, as Alcalde of Dosfuegos, I forbid you to tamper with the Monaga case until the Administrator has arrived from Central Chicago."

It was a notable speech for him. A single man-like gesture from the "astonished monkey." He could not have sustained it; perhaps it was no more than a passing possibility; determination born of despair, the automatically bared teeth of the trapped rat. God above and Fray Alejandro like a brown rock here on earth, and Stellow of Central Chicago—the great locomotive roaring down—it was too much for Pepe.

Fray Alejandro did not move. No surprise showed on his sagging face. His eyes switched from the form of Nida Monaga, her brown arms out on the table, her face down between them, to the Alcalde.

"I know of no Monaga case, my friend," he said. "I will be glad to help you in any way later."

Pepe stood his ground, the little chin out, the shoulders swung forward. "The case of Osmundo Monaga I can not allow to be discussed," he said. "Not before Mr. Stellow comes. Señor, I order you in the name of the Republic to leave this house."

He had a right to. He put that strong phrase, "in the name of the Republic," in front of him like a shield. He was not afraid any longer. Fray Alejandro looked at him a moment. Then the priest got to his feet, dropped a hand on Nida's head. His fat forefinger marked that easy cross on her forehead. Fray Alejandro inclined his sun-burned pate. "As you see fit," he said mildly. He went out the door where the sunlight poured over him. Pepe Rijo stood alone. Nida Monaga did not look up.

"Señorita," said Pepe, "I order you not to leave this house." His voice was husky with surprise, but he cleared it. She said nothing, so he spoke

louder, higher: "In the name of the Republic," he said.

Strength came into him then, triumph reared up again, hot and dizzying. He would go and find this Findley now. If Findley had been down there, he too should be detained. He stood looking at the back of Nina's head. "In the name of the Republic!" he shouted suddenly, shriller, and darted rat-like out the door.

• 3 •

"SEÑOR," said Pepe Rijo, "I detain you in the name of the Republic."

Under the arches, far back in the dark cavern of the café, Oliver Findley looked a little like a ghost. He wore a quite presentable linen suit. Its effect was spoiled by an old pair of brown shoes without any lacings. He sat back in the chair at such an angle that the shoes started off his stockingless feet. His lean face showed white under the tan. The narrow, pointed chin seemed to have been badly cut recently, but it was healing.

At Pepe he glanced with astonishment. Plainly he had been drinking, for he came close to looking happy. He raised a cigarette and pulled at it. The thing was out, though only a quarter smoked. "A light, please," he said to Pepe Rijo.

He waited while Pepe fumbled with a box of wax matches and accepted the light. "What did you say, señor?" he inquired.

"It is necessary for me to ask you not to make any move to leave Dosfuegos," explained Pepe. He felt confused again, but more abashed than angry and not at all afraid. "A dangerous accident has occurred. I am the Alcalde of Dosfuegos. I do not think there is any need to lock you up—"

"I cannot imagine any one stealing me," admitted Oliver Findley. He smiled gradually and added, "Sit down. If you are really the Alcalde, there should be no difficulty about credit."

"It would give me pleasure to drink with you," said Pepe. "But meanwhile I must say that in the name of the Republic—"

"I heard you," confessed Oliver Findley, admiringly. "Your Spanish is excellent."

"I was born in Dosfuegos, señor," said Pepe, dazed. "I do not understand."

"No need to," said Oliver Findley, nodding.

"I was born in Boston, Massachusetts, if you have any idea where that is. It does not seem to be much of anything to talk about."

"Well," faltered Pepe, "your Spanish is excellent, señor."

"It ought to be," agreed Oliver Findley. "My English is good, too. Better than you've ever heard. Aguardiente was mine, señor."

The man brought it and Pepe sat down. He had almost forgotten his earlier conclusion about the American, unable to retain so many thoughts at once, but now the resemblance to the Sancti Spíritus picture was so marked that he wondered with a tremor, half excitement, what he was doing, talking to this man. Then he remembered.

"I do not," he said carefully, "use the Republic's authority without grave cause, señor."

"Indeed?" said Oliver Findley. "It does you credit."

"In detaining you—"

"Am I detained?"

"It is necessary, señor," said Pepe apologetically, "for the time being only—"

"I do not," mused Oliver Findley, "know what Mr. Stellow will make of it. I do not think he wanted me around. Do you know him?"

Pepe knew. The mere mention of Mr. Stel-

low's name restored to him that sensation of his smallness, his helplessness, of the smallness and helplessness of all of them in the hollow of the Administrator's hand. "I have had my reports," he said quickly. There was no ostentation in it; he strove merely to think of himself safe on the United Sugar Company's side.

"Then you can easily understand," nodded Oliver Findley.

"He arrives this morning. I am detaining you until then only."

"Mr. Stellow," said Oliver Findley, "will be glad to see me, I expect. Aguardiente, if you insist, señor."

It was the Devil, of course. Nothing less than Evil almost omnipotent could concern himself so little with the Administrator's coming.

Pepe had met the Devil before. He knew the Devil walked the earth, and it was not because some priest had told him so, nor because he believed that dead hag, Cuchita, with her goat's blood and mumbling did anything but scare women. He was a "modern" man, and an officer of the Republic. Ghosts, aparecidos, espectros, ánimas en pena, who were—or had been—Cuchita's stock in trade, accounting for ugly things

not obviously explained, didn't impress him. Possibly it was a sluggish imagination which contented itself with simple explanations. It made him slow to relinquish old ideas and reluctant to accept new ones.

His demonology was of this sort; limited, but tightly grasped and exact. The Devil, some one had instructed him as a child, was what made things go wrong. Other details had doubtless been supplied, too, but one fact at a time was enough for Pepe. He built from it, in slow accumulation, like a sediment of thought, an idea; a truth; something he could count on. His idea was borne out strikingly by the picture at Sancti Spíritus, where the Devil was shown in death agonies, disembowled by S. Michael's spear point. With due regard for S. Michael, the archangel was obviously a fool. One did not slay the Devil so easily. The Devil persisted, death-defying. He merely became some one else.

The beautiful obviousness of such a concept thrilled Pepe with the same shock of truth which a scientist might feel, after protracted research, in seeing his hypothesis once more substantiated. More than that, Pepe saw a corollary—these things came to him over months and years as his mind turned like a dwarf wrestling with a giant,

pulling at the planted legs of enormous life—that the Devil became not one other person, but a legion. He could tell that, because so many things went wrong. If the Devil became only one other person his activities must be too limited to accord with fact. Thus one might be certain that the world harbored a large number of individuals who were the Devil, who made thousands on thousands of things go wrong.

They said, "Three Persons in one God." Not such a mystery. Only to people with complicated, analytical minds; people who could not have nor bear to hold a thought so devastatingly simple. "A thousand, ten thousand, persons in one Devil," was no harder. Sometimes Pepe thought deductively, with a weak sense of chaos: "Three, a thousand, ten thousand, persons in one person." It did not make sense, but it meant something.

It was on the Sancti Spíritus road that Pepe had met the Devil once before. Pepe was drunk, but there was enough wisdom in that wizened mind and body to realize that drunkenness was not entirely a mocker, or a raging. There were moments when the brain, poisoned, if you wished, out of its normal train, struck like a drifting ship on rocks very real. If Pepe had been sober he would have

been cold, tired, anxious to get home. Drunk, poisoned out of himself with alcohol, he was warm, overwhelmed with energy, careless of where he got. So he looked, pulled in his horse, and saw the Devil.

The Devil was riding a horse, too; riding on the Sancti Spíritus road, seeking whom he might destroy. There was a full moon that night. It was whiter than silver and clearer than day. The Devil did no more than give Pepe a smile, perfectly distinct in that moon-washed dark; a sight of teeth, a sight of eyes slanting. "Adiós," said the Devil, and went off in a peal of laughter. "We shall meet again, señor."

He rode on by.

All the drunkenness, all the warm mists of wine, dissolved in Pepe's head. He turned and held his horse still, and saw that it was the Devil, for the rider and his beast cast no shadow. Simply a black horse and a black man moving in the moonlight.

Pepe was not frightened. That was the alcohol. He knew it was the Devil, the same Devil whom S. Michael had fatuously impaled with his holy spear. Only that night the Devil had other business. He was bound for Sancti Spíritus—the city of the Holy Ghost, by satanic irony. Pepe guessed

where the Devil was going, too. Pepe had sat at the café near a girl who shouldn't have been there. Not in a public café at that hour. She was white-faced and drunk and had two men with her. Presently there would be three, Pepe knew now, and the black horse would be tied to a ring in the curb. The Devil could not absent himself. Not even to turn and ride disastrously with Pepe. He and Pepe would meet again.

Now, again, Pepe was not afraid, he found, although the blaze of sustaining confidence had died in him and he had not yet drunk anything. There would be no sense in being afraid. What was to happen, would happen. Relief poured into him. He need not exert himself, for exertion would be useless. He need not draw back, for he knew that whatever the Devil led him to would be pleasant. That was the Devil's way, and the Devil's revenge came hereafter. Not his revenge so much as his reward, for the Devil was not vengeful—at least, not compared to God, whose simple chief captain had tried to end the Evil One with a spear. "Hereafter" Pepe troubled rarely over. He could, in his oddly twisted reasoning, cheat the Devil there, for he did not believe in any hereafter.

He raised his little glass of aguardiente, nodded to the Devil, and swallowed it. He had a warm feeling of bravado, and out of it flowed satisfaction, that he, Pepe Rijo, Alcalde of Dosfuegos and servant of the Republic, should sit so calm and—if he did say so—unafraid, eye to eye with the Devil.

The Devil stirred in his chair and said . . .

..

• 4 •

PEPE RIJO left Oliver Findley in the café.

He left him in the middle of a sentence, toppling a chair over, bending his small shoulders to plunge through the arches into the contrasting brightness of the street. He had not planned this astonishing maneuver. He had been too frightened to plan anything. He sat crouched on the edge of his chair, across the table from the American, and stared, moistening his lips, from Oliver Findley's long brown hands, sunken on the backs with cords and veins standing through, to Oliver Findley's lean face with the eyes that twitched

constantly into the narrow slit-like slant; relaxing; twitching back again. Pepe had felt calm when he began, even after he admitted that it was the Devil. By resigning himself, it seemed to him that the Devil must be placated. He was bold, jaunty, ready to discuss pleasant sins with the Devil.

He was not ready to discuss the Monagas, though. He had no idea how he had come to mention them, nor why, when he realized that he had, he went on, bit by bit with a horror proportionately increasing, to relate all that Vidal Monaga had told him before Pepe asked Vidal to go into the room opposite the pier office and locked the door on him. Even then he could not stop. He felt as though he were growing into his chair, all inanimate wood except his tongue which moved thick and persistent in his mouth. He must explain about Mr. Stellow and Vidal, about himself and Mr. Stellow. His breath came quicker; he did not bother to close his mouth, sitting there sucking in air and staring at Oliver Findley. "How can I help it, señor?" he squeaked, breathless. "What am I to tell Mr. Stellow . . ."

"You might say—" Oliver Findley sipped,

screwing his eyes up, "You might say: 'I was afraid and went and hid thy talent in the earth.'"

Pepe Rijo's mouth hung farther open. "Hide?" he faltered. "I have not hid anything, señor. . . ."

Then the Devil laughed. He laughed with a table-shaking ungodly mirth, the noise of the Adversary snatching immortal souls under the nose of Heaven. Pepe Rijo's little mind turned over. It was a mental spasm, like the uncontrollable contraction of a nauseated stomach. He saw that he was insanely, horribly wrong. There could be no alliance with the Devil, no bold leaguings with the Evil One. You could as well be friendly with a shark; as profitably tell him you were on his side while his belly whipped over and his snout swerved on you.

Pepe Rijo left then, and the chair fell down.

In the street he did not run. He walked desperately, his mouth open, his legs throbbing, straight for the guard house at the gates of the railroad yard. He had the authority, though he never before had dreamed of using it, to turn out the guard and take what measures seemed necessary for the civil peace. In its disuse, he reflected on this privilege with pleasure. Now he did not reflect on anything. He snatched simply at one

last shield between himself and disintegration. He arrived with aching calves and short breath, held on to the door jamb and gasped: "Turn out, señor, in the name of the Republic."

The sergeant of the Company's guard corps was playing dominoes with a corporal, formality put away, bent over a small table until their mussed hair almost met. They swore in frank excitement, swinging their arms up and down. They had laid aside their cartridge belts with the annoyingly heavy revolvers, taken off their uniform coats. In relaxed comfort they glared at each other, puffing cigarette smoke. Hearing the Alcalde's voice, the sergeant half turned his head and said, "Begone, Chatterer!"

Had Pepe been less beside himself, he might have recovered and taken a humiliating departure. Now the same courage which faced Fray Alejandro swelled his thin voice to a roar.

"Attention!" he barked. "Obey my orders, Sergeant, or I'll have your skin!"

The sergeant, a thick-set hulk of a man, got to his feet aghast. He looked down at Pepe Rijo's small gleaming eyes and convulsed face. Then he said, stupefied still, "Turn out, Corporal."

Pepe rode the crest of his authority, balanced triumphant as on a racing surf board.

"Picket the yards," he stammered, exulting. "Sergeant, board the sugar boat. Get the gang planks up. No one is to land. No one is to approach the wharf. March!"

They went. Pepe went too, scurrying up the steps into the freight offices. No one was there yet but the Head Clerk and a telegraph operator. "I detain you in the name of the Republic!" Pepe shrilled through the screen doors. "Don't set a foot outside!"

A bugle sounded at the guard barracks. Figures with rifles stuck under their arms, buttoning coat collars, struggled out of the low white building and formed up.

"Ha!" said Pepe. "Ha!"

He stamped his foot, addressing the empty colonnade of the freight office. "Obey my orders, obey my orders!"

He raced out the gates into the street before he realized that he did not know where he was going.

Limpness came over him as he faltered. His intoxicating self-confidence weakened. He could see a squad coming at a quick-step down from the barracks. Workers were being rounded up in the yards, and straggled bewildered across the tracks toward the gate. On the sugar boat a yellow

quarantine flag jerked up a halyard—the indignant formality of an outraged British captain. Pepe, stunned, heard far away up the viaduct the clear soaring whistle which could be nothing but the train from Central Chicago with Mr. Stellow.

Pepe put his hand over his eyes to shut out the dreadful tokens of his audacity and began to walk. He turned down the first corner. Then he ran. He came to a gap in the fence and plunged through, creeping back along it, pressing himself into the corner. Crouched down, he squeezed against the boards and began mechanically to pray. “Loving Lord Jesus,” he groaned, “let it all not have happened. . . .”

It was the sound of a rifle shot that brought Pepe up. His heart seemed to halt. His head turned stiffly and he pushed his eye up to a crack.

Most of the wide sunny street was empty, but down by the railroad yard gates a little group stood ominously isolated; a guard, lowering his smoking rifle; a man carrying a bag; the solid white-clad form of the Administrator General.

At the corner a crowd of people, mechanics in overalls, dockhands in blue shirts, who had been sent out, stood paralyzed, all their faces turned one way. Pepe looked where they looked.

Twenty yards from the grim little group by the gates a figure lay huddled on the sand.

Pepe swallowed. He saw the Administrator's head turn, saw him looking about. There could be only one person he was looking for. Guards coming for Pepe, finding him, dragging him to Mr. Stellows' office while they batted him along with the butts of their guns and kicked him. He knew the guards.

When at last he got strength to move, he could not doubt that everything was lost, everything ruined. Fortunately water frightened him. He had never learned to swim. There was nothing left now but to go down to the estuary and throw himself in. Shaking, he remembered not irrelevantly, that story of Mr. Stellow and the man who fired the cane. Mr. Stellow got the man and stood by while his guards heated gun barrels red and burnt him so he admitted it. Pepe went out the gap in the fence and ran as fast as he could, down to the water, onto a little pier. He halted and took a deep breath.

Then he looked at the water, green, sluggish, moving deliberately seaward. He looked and looked. He thought how he had felt as a boy when bigger boys—though younger, to make it worse—like Osmundo Monaga pushed him in or

ducked him. Pressed him down and screamed with laughter while he strangled, almost out of his head, in that awful suffocating obscurity.

He took another breath and tried to move out to the end, but his feet would not go. He stood impotently. He turned at last and walked down the wharf again.

On the shore he saw a servant from the Casa.

"Are you deaf?" taunted this man insolently. "Move yourself, Don King-of-Town. The señor Administrator doesn't want to chop you to bits. No, and maybe there'll be no sunrise to-morrow, either."

———— II ————

CARIBBEAN IDYL

OSMUNDO MONAGA built boats.

At twenty-one, he had completed a dozen of them—fishing boats, famous for their excellent design and stout construction. A new one was always perched up behind the house in Dosfuegos where Vidal Monaga and his son and daughter lived.

Osmundo worked on his boat the greater part of each day, a colored handkerchief tied around his head, naked to the waist and burnt very brown. He worked slowly, but with remarkable steadiness and accuracy. Vidal, cleverer than most men with his fingers, marveled at his son. Tools became intelligent in Osmundo's powerful hands. He never hurried; he never made a mistake. The clean knocks of his mallets seemed to have a special, happy significance. It was the characteristic sound about the part of the village next to the river mouth. Trains moving in the yards, loading cranes squealing, dynamos turning over, could never drown or destroy it, nor had they ever taken

him away from it. Like his father (with whom Mr. Stellow had been in the habit of fishing, just the two of them, far out in a swaying gasoline launch, not talking much), Osmundo had never been in the employ of the Company. Mr. Stellow, distributing his patronage about Dosfuegos over the years of the great terminal's building, had never suggested it. Osmundo continued to make boats.

When he had finished a boat and his father had helped him to launch it, Osmundo sold it, for what he could get. Sometimes he gave it away—to a friend, for he was unconscious of the fact that he had no friends. This was because of his deep reserve, a dignity much like his father's, but sullen and more unreasonable. Actually it represented nothing beyond his complete absorption in his own affairs. He wanted nothing from any one, for thus Vidal, watching over his son that he might have what Vidal considered good in a man and necessary in a Monaga, had brought him up. None the less, Osmundo felt friendly toward a few people, a friendship so entirely disinterested that he never noticed whether it was returned or not.

When he gave a boat to some such person, the man was surprised and embarrassed, but he accepted it because no better boats were made.

Afterwards he might try to be more actively friendly with Osmundo, but it never came to anything, except sometimes a deeper dislike on the part of the man so favored; for Osmundo had already drawn back into his self-sufficient shell, surly and annoyed at interruptions and the idleness of people who talked and drank and lounged about the hot day through.

Left to himself Osmundo was content. With the knock of mallets and shriek of planes curling up long shavings, Osmundo mingled a rich and elaborately musical whistling. In the fashion of primitive people, he made up his music as he went along, experimenting, finally evolving with remarkable instinctive talent, tunes. Among a race so effortlessly musical, the tunes spread. They were common in the streets of Sancti Spíritus and Cienfuegos. A syncopated, rather spoiled version of one had been popular in Habana for a little while. It was titled, with appropriateness very odd, since the publisher who claimed it as his own never knew where it came from, *Idilio Mar Caribe*.

Mr. Stellow of Central Chicago heard it, recognized it, and bought a copy. The next time he came to Dosfuegos he brought it down to Vidal Monaga. Vidal, that man of many accomplish-

ments, could read simple music, and play it on a guitar of his own construction. There was no doubt about it; it was the tune Osmundo had made while he hammered. Osmundo, who did not understand printed music, thought that his father was fooling him, not playing at all from notes, but from memory. "What use," demanded Osmundo angrily, "would there be in printing tunes? People who liked music would make their own tunes. Do you think I am crazy?"

Vidal agreed indulgently. He was as pleased with his son's shortly phrased independence as he was with the excellence of Osmundo's accomplishments. "You know everything, Osmundo," he told him. "Next time, make a better one."

Vidal put the music away with his one or two important papers; his pilot's license, his commission as Master of the Port, and his appointment as Collector of Customs for the Republic. He would keep it proudly with what he still regarded as miracles; snapshots taken by Mr. Stellow of Osmundo's boats just before they were launched, a half a dozen worn and yellowed prints, dirty from much handling.

That January afternoon Mr. Stellow had brought down the music, he and Vidal took a small

boat out to fish. For years they had done this. There was nothing to distinguish this afternoon from a hundred past afternoons. Nothing but Osmundo, angry, hot, with the dangerous surliness he showed when people pushed into his affairs. He went down to the wharf to see the boat leave, paying as little attention as he could while his father explained that he and the Administrator would sleep out at the lighthouse on the keys, to lose no time in the morning. Without really fearing him, Osmundo had an inbred respect for the old man which kept him silent.

Vidal, standing in the boat, looked at him and said, "You are not wise, my son, if you cannot keep from making so silly a sight of yourself over nothing. In addition, when I speak to you, you will be attentive."

"I was listening," said Osmundo shortly.

Vidal took the fly-wheel of the motor. "You will be sorry for that temper, which is not like a man," he stated. "I am not proud of you when I see it." His strong hand twitched the wheel over and the motor caught. He pulled down his pilot's cap on his mane of white hair, smoothed his short thick beard and put the boat about. Mr. Stellow sat silent in the bow, smoking. Presently they were gone, headed seaward down the estuary.

Osmundo turned to go back to his boat and encountered Nida.

His sister told him he was a fool, blithely. Nida too had her moods. Her father was thick, of course. Just the same, she was moved to plague Osmundo. She pursued him to his boat.

"Behold the author of the magnificent Habana sensation, *Idilio Mar Caribe!*" she jeered. "He is such a stick of a yokel he cannot understand it. He has barely, my good people of Habana, sense enough to scratch when he itches."

"Unlike his lily of a sister, who knows the remedy when she itches," said Osmundo viciously.

She would have attacked him then, running up in a fury, but Osmundo, unhurried, took a block of wood and threw it, knocking her down with a cut in her scalp. Not moving from his position by the boat he satisfied himself that she was very slightly injured and took up his mallets, and presently, his whistling.

It was getting toward evening, so he could not work very long anyway, but he worked long enough for Nida to recover and see him doing it. Nida was in fact not much hurt, but she remained on the ground, first choking with rage and casting about for some sort of revenge, and then, becoming calmer, hoping to frighten him. Osmundo,

as the sun got down, supposed there would be no one to attend to Nida, if she needed it, and more important, no one to prepare supper for him, so he put his tools away, drew the old sail over the open hold, and jumped down. He kicked Nida, gently and persuasively, but Nida remained limp. Osmundo was not deceived. He picked her up and carried her into the house where he laid her on her bed and throwing a handful of salt into a dipper of water, stirred it with his big hand and applied the result to the cut. It smarted enough for Nida to howl and scratch him.

"I'm hungry," he said significantly.

"I hope you starve," answered Nida. "My skull is broken."

"You have your tongue to thank for that. Pull it out before it breaks every bone in your body."

"You'll get no food to-night, to teach you better manners."

"While there is no place to get so much talk, there are other places to get food," said Osmundo. He put his shirt on and went out.

Nida Monaga remained stretched on her bed. Dusk was filling the small room with its uneven floor and customary pale blue walls. It was quite bare, except for a large color print of N.S. del

Cobre; the Blessed Virgin in great glory manifesting Herself to the white fisherman and the negro crouched praying in a boat unnaturally small amid waves unnaturally large. Lightning and black clouds and fragments of wrecked ships embellished it further. Nida kept it there mainly to annoy her father, who had only contempt for churches and priests. Probably it did not annoy him very much, for since she was a woman it could not matter what she believed.

Whether she did believe in any religion, Nida never knew and did not seriously care. She believed in Cuchita Hervas and her practices. They were literal, and if not understandable, at least they worked without loading you with absurd requirements which neither man nor sensible god could have any interest in. Her father had as much contempt for Cuchita as for the church, she knew, but then her father never wanted anything. When you wanted things, it did no harm to have Cuchita help you. Neither did it do any harm to pray for them. Nida made her confession and received the sacrament when she was in the mood, for there was a certain stimulating drama in it. She did not, however, trouble to listen to Fray Alejandro's godly counsel, nor did she purpose in any way to practice good works.

What had made her think now about God and Cuchita and Fray Alejandro, she could not imagine, but suddenly she decided she would pray, lying on her back and feeling the cut on her head thoughtfully. She was not concerned enough to pray very intently; indeed, something akin to the twisted irony which made her plague Osmundo about his song, made her invite, reverently and in good order, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph to bring her supper without the trouble of her getting up. There was no chance that any attention would be paid to the request, she knew. That was what amused her. The Holy Ones couldn't, to save their heads, bring her supper. Becoming more and more certain of this, she presently gave over praying and began to laugh. She laughed until she rolled off the bed. "A thousand thanks, my masters," she said, and got up to see what she could do for herself.

• 2 •

OSMUNDO MONAGA had eaten rice and eggs and a little fish at the tienda where a canteen was provided for the men in the employ of the United

Sugar Company who did not have homes in Dos-fuegos. They had tickets which Cipriano, who managed the place, punched. Most of them were strangers—laborers sent down to load a boat, or guards, mechanics, engine crews who lived at Central Chicago and Central Espalada. Osmundo had no ticket, but Cipriano would never ask him to pay because of his father and Mr. Stellow.

The men ate, coming and going, under the arches of a long whitewashed room beyond the café, with a dozen arc lights hanging on wires from the blank vaults and blazing over the bare tables set with tin plates, tin cups and one large spoon. Periodically a door swung in under the arch of a little window at the end communicating with the kitchens and a monstrous platter of rice or stew, fried bananas or fish, was pushed out on the shelf. The people nearest it arose and took it, sliding it along the tables. Cipriano, so fat he moved with difficulty, walked up and down, dodging in and out of the café, picking his teeth or pausing to expostulate with people who took more than their share. Occasionally he set a fresh earthenware jug of sour red wine at the end nearest the café bar and watched its rapid progress with melancholy eye. The Company paid him a

lump sum and anything he could save was his.

Just the same, he was glad to see Osmundo, for he took care that they realized at Central Chicago that he fed the Monagas practically all the time. This was difficult to establish when neither Vidal nor Osmundo had been seen there for months.

"Señorita is ill?" he suggested to Osmundo, coming all the way down with the latest jug of wine and setting it where Osmundo could help himself before the rest of the table got it. Osmundo accepted this favor without acknowledgment.

"No," he said. "I just knocked her down."

"That's the way," admitted Cipriano, resigned. "What for?"

"Because I chose," returned Osmundo and devoted himself to the food.

He did not feel so disagreeable as he sounded. He could see no reason why Nida should prepare food for him, or even allow him inside the house, aside from his ability to knock her down. If he were for any reason unable to do this, he would not expect to be waited on. If he were sick and needed help, he would consider it entirely just and reasonable if she ignored him, let him die if it came to that.

In the present case he had squared accounts

with Nida by his well-thrown block of wood and he bore her no further ill-will. He even admired her in a way. She wasn't any beauty, but God knew men didn't seem to mind looking at her. She always had them trailing around, and she was certainly no better than she ought to be. This was no concern of his, for like his father, he could not see that a woman was of any actual importance. In Osmundo, too, something of Vidal's exact sense of justice found a place. If he insisted on managing his own business, he was perfectly ready to let any one else do the same. Unless, of course, these two businesses were to meet head on. In that event it seemed to him right and natural that the stronger or cleverer should (as experience amply proved he would) have his way.

He went out when he had eaten, walking slowly under the clear winter stars smoking a cigarette. He encountered no one but Pepe Rijo, the Alcalde, who said good evening to him.

"Que va, Mado?" he answered, careless of the little man's resentment, and placidly forced him off the boards of the walk, exemplifying unself-consciously his own theories of life.

When he got to the house he turned in, noticing it was dark. A second later he recognized, unsurprised, that nature and reason had once more

prevailed, for he encountered a stinging crack from a heavy cooking spoon on his ear. He got it again on the jaw before he succeeded in catching hold of Nida and twisting it out of her hand. In the scuffle he dropped it and contented himself with closing his fingers on her throat until she screamed, stifling.

“Now,” he asked, “have you had enough?”

He reached for the switch. The white glare of electricity filled the room and he saw that she undoubtedly had, for her face was dusky, growing purple. She got as far as the couch, and crawled on it. Crouching there with her hands raised to her neck, she swallowed and gasped and groaned, closing her eyes and then opening them to stare at him.

Osmundo stuck a cigarette in the corner of his mouth and stared back, feeling for a box of matches. “You have yourself to thank,” he announced. The cigarette moved a little and smoke mixed casually with the words. He put his hands into the lower pockets of his shirt and rocked slowly from his heels to his toes. “Well, at whom are you looking?”

The cigarette shook with his lips in faint interrogation, nodding up and down. He was inexplicably ill at ease and it angered him. Sharp lines

appeared on his brown forehead and the eyebrows went down dangerously.

Nida swallowed, coughed and choked. Finally her voice came. "You, you dirty—" She coughed again.

Osmundo moved forward ominously, a powerful, negligent advance. Nida drew up her skirt a little. Her hand came out grasping a short thin knife with a black handle.

"Much good," said Osmundo, "will that do you! Drop it before I break your arm getting it."

She balanced the blade on her knee, her mouth drawn at the corners, her black eyes wide. Osmundo came on, neither faster nor slower, until he stood squarely over her, the cigarette still smoking between his lips. "Now what do you want to say to me?" he asked.

Abruptly Nida's wide eyelids, as though released by a spring relaxing, sank slanting over her eyes. The hand on her knee fell open and the knife clattered down.

"Osmundo," she said, "don't you love me?"

Osmundo took the cigarette out of his mouth, held it a moment and dropped it on the floor, shrugging slightly. He put his foot on it. "Not that much, little animal!"

Nida raised the back of one hand to her lips a

moment and then she screamed. "You filthy, filthy liar!" She spat at him convulsively and the other hand darted down for the knife on the floor.

Osmundo, quicker, kicked it clattering into the corner, but the motion threw him a little off his balance. Coming half erect Nida locked her arms about his neck, dragging him so he fell sideways on his knees. She forced her lips hard against his mouth. "You lying dog!" she managed through her tight teeth.

• 3 •

FRAY ALEJANDRO had been hearing confessions all afternoon and he was tired now, for it was past supper time. His big body was more dependent on regular food than most people's. Recognizing it, he fasted frequently, schooling himself to ignore the ache in his stomach. No appreciable effect was produced on his bulk, since God apparently willed him to be fat.

While not a subtle theologian, at times like this Fray Alejandro saw clearly an opening for Satan's adroitness, for if he did not set his mind on ignor-

ing his hunger, his misery made him inattentive. The other prong of the devil's fork was the probability that concentration would make him equally so. This situation gave his broad face a clamminess due in no way to heat. He sat still, his eyes a little glazed, his thick hands meekly folded. Occasionally moistening his wide dull-colored lips, he inclined his ear gravely. He would have done precisely the same, even had arrangements in Dosfuegos been less informal and a confessional sheltered him.

Nida Monaga was unaware of his trial. It would have interested her very little if she had perceived it, for she was filled with the full satisfaction of a rôle which made her and her doings the theoretical center of a profound interest both in Heaven and on earth. Consciousness of sin, or shame, which might make the sacrament an ordeal and a penance in itself for people differently constituted, left her unaffected. In an ecstasy of enjoyment she proceeded, “. . . by my fault, by my own fault, by my own most grievous fault . . .”

Her hand rose decorously, striking her breast.

Fray Alejandro sighed soundlessly and put his empty stomach out of mind with renewed resolution.

“. . . Blessed Mary, Ever-Virgin; Blessed Michael the Archangel; Blessed John Baptist; the Holy Apostles, Peter and Paul; and all the Saints; and thee, father. . . .”

What a company! Every one of them bending down with eager attention. Nida had the sensation of kneeling in the midst of an admiring circle. There was, too, an advantage over more earthly groups, for no one of these listeners would pass on, to your future inconvenience, what you chose to tell them. If you admitted what you had done, they would not betray you; if you decided to make up things, they would not verify and correct you.

The sweat ran anew on Fray Alejandro's face. Two flies settled deliberately on his bald pate. He ignored this fresh discomfort, keeping his hands in humble quiet.

Nida went forward luxuriously to enumerate the faults she “remembered especially”; not dissembling nor concealing any of them; advancing, as she had been taught, down the commandments and their multitude of implied requirements, doing them detailed justice.

No hurtarás. . . .

Well, she had stolen several things. Especially she remembered some eggs which undoubtedly belonged to Agueda Rijo's ducks; three, and then

two more another time; that made five. She meant to give them back, though.

No fornicarás. . . .

"And, Father," she said humbly, "I have been impure. . . ."

Fray Alejandro sighed again; half involuntary, half some special resignation. She was not expected to volunteer any more. Fray Alejandro would take over the examination; by suitably phrased questions uncovering whatever fullness a young girl's shame might have.

This Nida enjoyed intensely, yet now, as he began, she was gripped with a doubt, an anthropomorphic touch to the vision of the Heavenly Host about to be dangerously informed. She put a hand on Fray Alejandro's arm, pulling at it. She said, quickening with alarm, "But my father will never know?"

"Your Heavenly Father knows already," reproved Fray Alejandro, moving his cramped legs ever so slightly. "Consider now how much more awful that is than your earthly father's knowing. You are safe from your earthly father unless you tell him yourself, but who is safe from the eye of God?" The sweat ran again and he added, "Take thought to repent truly."

Nida brushed the suggestion aside. "He might kill me," she said.

"Man kills once only, but God's damnation is everlasting. Take thought, my daughter, of the fearful fate of the unrepentant."

"Of course, I do not know that my father would kill me," admitted Nida, recovering her sense of proportion a little, "I do not know that he would pay any attention to me. Osmundo is all he cares about."

Fray Alejandro sighed once more.

"Continue, my daughter," he urged mildly.

His gravity moved her with reassuring pleasure. The remnants of her recent fright touched it to an exquisite emotion. She bent down her head happily and whispered, "Father, I am the most miserable of creatures. . . ."

Night had settled altogether when she heard Fray Alejandro's absolution. She had wept and deliciously humbled herself; she was weak; worn with the stress of her conjured emotions, but she was at peace in her perfect satisfaction.

Fray Alejandro went waddling, resolutely slow, up to the cantina, the meal ticket which the United Sugar Company provided for him, tight in his fist. He said fourteen Ave Marias for his late penitent, and one for himself, to guard against greediness.

Nida was hungry too. She came into the house

in haste. Osmundo and her father, their shoes off, sat studying sections of an old Habana newspaper, her father pronouncing the words under his breath; Osmundo, with a scowl. Vidal said good evening to her with formal indifference. Osmundo dropped his paper at once, following her into the kitchen.

“You talked a long while to that fat old thief,” he said pensively. “You’ll have a care what you say, or I’ll throw you into the sea for the barracuda.”

“I tell him nothing, great fool!” retorted Nida, peering into a pot. “Run and throw yourself in!”

• 4 •

DURING the previous year, while Central Espalada was being completed, duplicating Central Chicago, the old railroad was rebuilt. Miles of low mud embankment with narrow drainage ditches were replaced by solid concrete, arched viaduct and steel beam, to carry the enormous new locomotives through the south coast swamps. At

the same time, the Company bought up a whole section of Dosfuegos, then swept it clean of the shacks and wooden houses tilting erratically, and extended the railroad yards so hundred-car trains could be accommodated without confusion.

Vidal Monaga had owned one of the large pieces thus covered with switches and sidetracks. The Company had been almost a year and a half searching the titles and settling claims, but now, toward the end of the present April, Vidal was paid.

He did not think of saving what he got. His needs were so simple that he had no urge to look forward, like a thrifty man, to greater comfort in his old age, or what was called independence. Vidal had no conception of comfort except as an unworthy softness of life, contemptible in a man. Independence was so bred into his bone that he never had reason to think of it. His present earnings were ample. When he could pilot boats or fish no longer, the Republic would pension him.

Pressed, he might have explained it that way, but closer to the fact was the incredibility of not being able to work, and the quiet acceptance of a mind which knows that in all truth as yesterday is gone, to-morrow does not exist.

Vidal took the money he got to divide it into

three parts; one fifth for himself; three fifths for Osmundo—and, exactly just, one fifth for Nida.

The idea, so easily expressed in fractions, did not occur to him for his mathematics embraced only simple counting. He wished Osmundo to have more than himself and Nida put together. To do this, he converted the whole sum into American gold coins at the Company bank, brought it home and emptied it in a resplendent heap on the floor of the front room, first moving all the furniture to one side. Then, patiently, his leonine head bent down, his monumental brown forehead twitching with perplexity, he began to divide the gold pieces.

At the end of the first afternoon he had not been able to do what he wanted, so he swept all the money up and put it back in the bag, completely baffled to find that while four was twice two, if you added two more to four and two more to two, the first did not remain twice the second.

During the night the idea came to him of doing it by hundreds, and if by hundreds, why not five hundreds? In the morning he began again, patiently stacking up his coins. Drawing a chalk line down the floor, he was able to accumulate Osmundo's on one side and Nida's and his on the other. In this way there were two heaps and one

irregular heap remained over. Rather than risk the confusion of the night before, he awarded this to Osmundo. Then, piece for piece, he divided the money on the side allotted to him and Nida. After that he wiped his forehead and called in his son and daughter, heretofore rigorously excluded.

Nida was perfectly satisfied, since she had not been sure that she would get anything, just as she knew from experience that Osmundo would get the larger part of whatever Vidal had to give. She expressed her gratitude loudly and long, though Vidal paid no attention to her, being intent on Osmundo's reserved pleasure. Osmundo was undoubtedly pleased, and showed it by being gruff while he collected the coins.

Vidal said, "That, because I am proud of you, my son."

Nida permitted herself to sniff privately—to be proud of that yokel! Her father's conception of pride had always been as much of a mystery to her as his phrases about honor,—a special species of his nonsense, to Nida's mind. None the less she asked Osmundo, frankly curious, what he was going to do with the money.

"Keep it," said Osmundo shortly.

"Why don't you put it in the bank?" persisted

Nida, moved to share somehow in the disposal of that amazing heap.

"I'll take care of what I do," answered Osmundo, carrying it into his room.

He would take up a plank in the corner and bury it in the ground, Nida knew. It was a pity that such a fool should have so much money. She shrugged, went into the kitchen and got a towel, made a bundle of hers, and marched down to the Company's bank, where she crashed it on the counter. Elbowing her way in ahead of a line of dockhands whose pay cards were being cashed, she demanded attention haughtily. In the end she came away with a little book, lettered *Bank of the United Sugar Company* on the cover, with her name and the figures on the first pages of the inside.

Osmundo, unimpressed, said, "Pray God you ever see it again!" but Nida knew better than that. Every one in Dosfuegos who had any money had such a book. She felt comfortably superior to her father's simplicity and Osmundo's surly distrust, realizing more clearly than ever what fools they were. Far behind, things left them. Osmundo, she supposed, thought the United Sugar Company wanted his pennies; he wouldn't even know what the United Sugar Company with its mills and rail-

roads and millions was like, what any modern thing was like. Nida knew instinctively that when such a Company wanted to take a thing, it would be something worth taking, and that when such a Company failed, all Cuba would go to ruin, making it no difference what you did. Vidal was just as bad, for he could not comprehend an opportunity. In fifteen years, while he had known Mr. Stellow, and Mr. Stellow had shaken his hand and treated him alone in Dosfuegos as his "intimo amigo," this was all he had ever gotten from the Company. Reflection on it filled Nida, whose appetite was whetted for more figures and rubber-stamped dates in the blank columns of her little book, with indignation. To Osmundo she said suddenly, "I'm going to be rich."

"No, you're not," said Osmundo nonchalantly.

"I am!"

"No one would ever give you any money. You're too ungrateful."

"I don't have to have people give it to me. I'll get it."

"I know you. You'll go to Sancti Spíritus and spend it all buying silk and then be too lazy to make dresses out of it, so you won't have anything but a lot of talk, as always."

"Anyway, I'm not ungrateful," she said.

“Haven’t I been good to you? And what have you ever done for me?”

“What can one do for a pig in a dung heap?” cried Nida, blazing. “When you try to touch me again, I’ll cut your heart out! And when I’m rich, I’ll drive in an automobile and spit on you!”

“Well,” said Osmundo, unmoved, “I can spit on you right now, and if you don’t get out of here, I will.”

• 5 •

IT was getting light.

The misshapen moon, surprised by early April dawn, hung white as fleece over the masses of the western hills. Mist was in the low places and dew lay gray on the coarse grass. The freshness of the air went into one like cool water. Intense in the earlier darkness, the silence had grown fragile now; a palm leaf broke it with a hard rustle; there was a faint falling crash of bamboo stirring; buzzards in pensive black arcs shattered it to fragments over the carcass of a dead bull.

Cuchita Hervas, perched on her rat of a horse

like a bundle of colored rags, prodded the lean flank with a spur hung on her bare heel. The animal paid no attention beyond sidestepping with listless resignation. Cuchita began to mumble rhythmically.

Nida, riding her horse slowly behind, drew the shawl tighter over her head and made no effort to understand. The words, if they were words, proceeding out of Cuchita's sunken mouth would not make sense. That part of Nida's mind which was forthright and matter-of-fact recoiled uneasily. She felt like crying, "Oh, be still!"

The inner impatience, growing ever since they had left Dosfuegos before dawn, did not carry her that far. Nor even in that direction. When she was not getting acute enjoyment from them, she had no difficulty in making fun of Fray Alejandro and his mysteries. Not Cuchita's, though. She searched her mind and could assure herself that she never really had. The point was important to her, for she felt it might make a difference, now that she needed Cuchita on her side so vitally. She had always believed in them, she was sure, even if she did not choose to think of them all the while. The dark movements of fate, the wheeling stars, and mystic pyramids of numbers; the strange designs dug in the earth with a stick—just beyond

— THE SON OF PERDITION —

the swift stream of your ordinary life these great realities waited. Like a traveler moving in awful darkness, you could stretch out your right hand and feel the face of a cliff you could not see; stretch out your left hand, and hold it over a bottomless abyss, blanketed from you by your blindness.

Nida had no desire to see these things. Cuchita, who did, showed the marks of it on her semi-negroid face, sunken and lined with permanent horror. Her eyes, hardly human, were like a cornered animal's eyes. Her fingers had shrunk thin as claws. She trembled with sudden paroxysms and breathed in frightening gasps. Her life was a long battle with incantations and charms against the black powers eager to crush out the wisdom which had betrayed them. Here could never be any peace; no parleying, no long relief from peril, just as her only allies must be charm-compelled powers, forced to serve, feverish to escape. Faithfulness or friendship would be easier between a man and a serpent.

Nida sought no contact with such things. Thought of them only turned her day black, her hope to horror; made her look hard at every detail of bush and vine and trodden earth of the trail, gathering the strength of these natural

things, the comforting strong shield they held over the eyes that stared so straight into Cuchita's.

What Cuchita might wrest from them was another matter. She would not think of how Cuchita did it. One need not doubt them, or Cuchita's power; but swayed on a delicate balance, one might distrust, faintly, fearfully, beings so dreadful and power so precarious. Nida would rather trust only herself. To be placed thus in other hands swung her giddyingly between passionate regret and exulting confidence. But she would not, she knew, do it, if it were to do over now.

Of course she had not really stolen Osmundo's money, she had merely borrowed for a little while. People who left money under the floor where it was of no use to any one, should not mind. Osmundo would not want it for a long time since he had not wanted it for a full week now, and if he did not want it, he would not look at it. Meanwhile she had the folded lottery ticket thrust in under her dress-front. Though she remembered only hazily the involved significance of the combined numerals, Cuchita knew it could not lose. The money would be back long before Osmundo investigated. This morning, going for the reports

of the drawing, so fatefully close, she did not care to think of any other possibility, but when she took the gold one more had occurred to her. Even if things went wrong, it was not her own money lost; at worst there would be still the chance of convincing Osmundo that she knew nothing of its disappearance.

She pushed her horse up alongside Cuchita. "You know I shall win?" she demanded.

Cuchita had been riding with eyelids drawn down over her eyes. "You win something," she agreed. A strange, unearthly impression that behind the sunk lids Cuchita watched it happen as she spoke alarmed Nida even more than it encouraged her. "Money. A large sum. Money."

She said it in passing, preoccupied, as though the closed eyes strained from future to future, invisible sequence to invisible sequence and suddenly she added, "There is a pale horse on this road."

It had a perfect low note of alertness to peril as though she hid to one side with Nida, watching some breath-taking danger approach. Nida stared about, frozen, riding closer still.

Very deliberately, Cuchita laid her hand between her horse's ears. Her first finger and her little finger stared out convulsively, making the

horns. Nida took her tongue in her teeth, pressing close to Cuchita. Cuchita said, "Suppose the stars promised you a safe journey somewhere. There is no power to prevent it."

Her voice faded. When it awoke again, it was lower, hurried and tense like a guitar string. "But suppose," she said harshly, "that when you arrived . . ." The fingers on the outstretched hand stiffened suddenly. Her other hand locked on Nida's arm. "That when you arrived, you found battle and murder, plague and destruction. . . ."

"You mean in Sancti Spíritus to-day?" gasped Nida.

"No," said Cuchita. She tightened her hold on Nida's arm. "Not to-day. Not—" She moaned aloud. "Destruction is the end of some safe journey," she whispered.

Nida's eyes moved away, stiff. Then without any warning, the horses shied, quick and hard to the left. Nida's eyes went to the roadside grass, and she screamed out shrill, "There's a dead man!"

Cuchita's fingers went like iron clamps, sinking into her arm muscles. "Do not stop!" she cried, "do not look! For the love of God's Mother, get by! Do not say what you see! Do not put your eyes on it!"

The horses broke away running, hoofs heavy on the trail. A low branch slashed at Nida's head, they went over a rise, down, and water smashed about their passage of a little brook. At the crest beyond Cuchita pulled up, shining with sweat, her face whiter under it than the limestone rock about them. Her breath came tight, but she opened her eyes and looked through the low cut, out over the blue reaches of the cane and the tobacco fields with solitary palms in the sun, and finally the short towers of Sancti Spíritus in the middle distance.

"There is no haste now," she said. "But I do not know . . ."

They moved on slowly in the growing heat. Nida's thought seemed to have congealed, as though the brain had turned to ice in her skull. Like ice melting, now in the warmth, with the smell of sun on the cane and sound of insects in the sun, thought came again; ideas moved and ran swifter. She was not even sure she had seen anything really, except—she jerked her mind from that as one takes a lathered horse's head from water. A quick disturbing shrewdness troubled her.

She wondered if Cuchita might not be losing faith in her own computations, and was paving the way to an explanation if something went wrong. She was not doubting. No; too late, too fatal to

do that. But things could go wrong. Suddenly she resolved, "I'll sell half my cursed ticket if I can, when I get there."

• 6 •

HUNDREDS of people from the field had come into Sancti Spíritus where the drawing of the National Lottery was reported by direct wire from Habana. Secret cockfights were being held, although the law forbade it except on Sundays and holidays. This gave the impression that there were many more women than men. Nida saw no one at all whom she knew except Pepe Rijo, from Dosfuegos.

Because of his official capacity, Pepe was not asked to any of the cockfights. He wandered about too depressed to be even hopeful that any of his luck of fourteen years ago remained for the dirty fragment of ticket he held. The sight of some one he knew drew him to Nida and Cuchita. Cuchita went to stay, as usual, with a cousin of hers in the wretched huts by the river where she

could mumble and make charms all day. In the anxious cordiality of loneliness, Pepe pressed Nida to take something to drink.

"I say," he told her, resuming something of the swagger that exclusion from the company of the cockfighters had taken away, "that drink's the thing. If you win, you're all the happier. If you lose, what difference does it make?" He made a gesture intended to be cavalier.

Nida agreed with him. Nervousness was growing on her. Possibilities of what Osmundo might do if she lost, and he discovered she had stolen his money weighed on her. She wished miserably that she had either stayed out, or at least taken some of her own money from the bank.

Well, no; she meant to keep that, whatever happened. It would be better to take a beating from Osmundo. . . .

"By the way," she said to Pepe, "I've got a ticket that's sure to win."

Pepe had heard of such tickets too often, but he wanted her company, so he forced interest into his small face and listened.

"Well," he agreed, "you won't want to let that out of your hands.."

"I might," said Nida.

"No, no," objected Pepe. "Never!"

"To an old friend and fellow-townsmen," suggested Nida, despondent.

"No real friend would take such an advantage of you," pointed out Pepe ardently. "We'll drink to your good fortune."

He entertained her then with an account of the dance at the Sociedad the night before, glad to be talking again. Nida drank and regarded him morosely. "I'd give you a quarter for fifty dollars," she said.

"No, no," protested Pepe, alarmed, "that would not be fair."

Nida continued to drink, and as she drank, her concern minimized. If he didn't want to, he needn't.

As Pepe Rijo drank, he too thought, studying Nida's straight nose and lips drawn tighter as her dark eyes turned sullen to look into the sunlit street. Encouraged by what he had drunk, he began to consider possibilities which had never before occurred to him. His little eyes probed at her and he said, "Are you riding home with Cuchita?"

"No," answered Nida indifferently, "she is going to stay here a few days."

"Would you do me the honor of riding home with me?"

"Why not?"

"If you will," said Pepe deliberately, "I will buy half your ticket."

Nida turned her eyes from the street. So that's what he was after! She lowered her eyelids. It would be easy enough to give this monkey the slip. Even in prospect she enjoyed the idea. She looked at him, and then she began to smile. Under the table she squeezed his bony little knee. "All right, chico," she nodded, "that's understood. . . ."

He fumbled in the pouches of his cartridge belt and produced a roll of bills. Nida removed the big folded ticket from the front of her dress languidly and detached half the coupons, pushing them over to him.

Twelve noon.

In Habana, hundreds of miles away, a pair of crystal urns stood on a huge mahogany table in the presidential palace. Before them waited two little girls, carefully starched and rather frightened, from the Beneficia orphanage. A bell rang. The little girls looked doubtful, more frightened, then reached hastily, each taking out a pellet. Seven officers in dress uniform sat in a row on the far side of the table. The one in the center smoothed

out the papers and read aloud. The others wrote. The bell rang again, and the little girls, more confident, thrust in their hands, drew out second pellets. . . .

Another officer with clamps over his sleek hair and a telephone mouthpiece swaying repeated his numbers. Down in the offices twenty telegraph operators touched their keys into clicking chorus. In a hundred hot towns people paused electrified, breathless. Out as many narrow doorways stepped lottery agents, raised pieces of chalk to posted blackboards and made figures.

Craning her neck in a doorway with Pepe, Nida saw it come. Three—her heart almost halted—but it went 8 then. Well, she had never expected the first prize. There was a complete silence while the agent went inside.

A drunken colonio lurched by. "Blood of God!" he hiccoughed, "one number different! Blood of God!" He stumbled and fell on his face by the blue wall.

Nida took the tip of her tongue in her teeth and bit it a little. She could feel her heart hammer.

Numbers, more numbers.

They formed a tall white column on the board.

She was sick abruptly, sick in her heart; be-

trayed. All for nothing. She moved and went and sat down. There was some rum left in the glass Pepe had been drinking from. She reached and took it, swallowed it, staring at the restless heads and press of moving backs in the door. The aching hot silence loaded on her like stone blocks.

Then she heard Pepe shrill out startingly. He came rushing in, knocked over a chair. "Not yours," he shouted, "mine! Mine!"

Nida was stoical unexpectedly. "Good luck, hombre," she nodded. "I'll have another drink."

Pepe squealed for champagne, running and beating on the bar. Nida paid no attention to him while he talked and shouted. He had a second bottle and they began to drink that.

"I'm going," said Nida.

Pepe blinked at her. "But," objected Pepe, "I—"

"What affair is it of yours?" snapped Nida. "You won, didn't you?"

"But not on your ticket, on mine!"

"Well, what of that? You have the money."

"You are cheating me, señorita!"

"Go tell some one how."

He sat back in the chair and looked at her. He wiped his forehead and said suddenly, "And if I bought the other half of your ticket?"

He was drunk, she saw; out of his small wits with excitement.

She shook her head stolidly.

He put one of his hands on her bare arm. "I have money," he whispered, "I am rich. What is your ticket to me? I'll buy the rest and add one hundred dollars."

Nida paused.

"Two hundred," said Pepe, rolling his eyes.

Nida looked away.

"Three hundred!"

Nida lifted a shoulder. "From a rich man—" she said.

"Four hundred!"

His eyes popped out at her, bright with frantic obstinacy. Nida drew a breath. Slowly she stretched out her foot under the table and rubbed his ankle. "For five hundred—" she said, and looked away.

"You're robbing me," he said, dazed. He pushed a hand over his eyes.

"Very well," shrugged Nida, "are we to sit here with empty glasses forever?"

When she had the money, all of it, bound about and rolled securely in her stocking, she thought of what Cuchita had said. She ought to give Cuchita a gift, she supposed, but by that time her own head

was swimming; she had not the energy to go and seek Cuchita out. Besides, she owed it to herself, not to any esoteric powers.

They sat there drinking until she saw, surprised, that it was dark outside. She thought; now, if I could give him the slip . . . and arose.

Pepe was drunk, but no drunker than she was, probably, for he too straightened up and stood on his feet. No matter; she might find a chance on the road, if she was careful.

They got out of town somehow, by the huge shadows of houses, under the splashes of street lights, out to the vault of stars over the black country. She was unsteady in the saddle, swaying, but it seemed to her Pepe was worse. His head kept falling until it almost touched his horse's neck, then jerking back slowly. At times he made a noise like strangled singing. He might fall asleep, she knew, and the horse would carry him patiently home. Or when they got farther, she might contrive to push him out of the saddle and leave him.

Time passed. She could not see the trail at all. She peered up out of a black world, out of the dark depths of trees and little hills and crowded bushes, up to the vast and vivid heavens. She felt so entirely alone, she almost forgot Pepe. When

she remembered him, she looked, and there was his bent black form on the shuffling horse. Now was the time to get away but something had come over her, for in this secret and midnight world it mattered less, everything lost in the tides of darkness lying close to the earth.

She heard him say, as though he were coming out of a trance, "Let's stop here."

Automatically she said, "No, not yet," but he rode alongside and pulled at her.

She made an effort to resist and it sent her head spinning. She felt herself sway, lean, and fell, slipping out of the saddle and down into the dirt of the trail. Pepe dismounted painfully, while she lay unconcerned, with her eyes open. She could see the horses standing, their ears sharp and black against the mighty sweep of stars.

•7•

OSMUNDO said: "About that day you went to Sancti Spíritus."

He said it without looking up. He flopped a

heavy fish on the hacked table in the wharf shed. With one vicious stroke he brought the machete down, severing the head, picked it up and tossed it into the box of entrails and refuse. He turned the fish on its back, slitting it from end to end with the keen point.

“Well?” he said.

Nida, with a little knife, went on cleaning out these torn carcasses. “Sancti Spíritus?” she asked. “When was I in Sancti Spíritus?”

“About a month ago, I mean,” answered Osmundo. “Sometime I’m going to hear where you went that night, for staying with that hag Cuchita, I know you were not.” He glanced at her, his eyeballs turning white in the shadow of the shed. He bent, tugged, and heaved a fresh fish onto the table, scraped the scales from the machete against the edge of the wood, and slashed powerfully.

“Look what you’re doing!” urged Nida. “That’s a dog fish, and no use to God or man.”

“And if I wanted the skin?” asked Osmundo. “Talk less and work more.”

“What do you want the skin for?”

“Something I am making which is no concern of yours. You be thinking of another lie to tell me of where you were that night.”

“Since you know so well, so much better than I

know myself, what use is there in telling you anything? Why should I concern myself, Don Dog-Fish-Catcher?"

"When you get to this," said Osmundo, "scrape off the flesh, too; and don't cut the skin or I'll break your head for you."

"That I shall never get to," retorted Nida. "Clean your own filthy creature. I am tired of your talk."

Osmundo heaved the dog fish, decapitated and disembowled, with a smacking thud in front of her. Nida pushed it aside. Holding his machete stroke on the new fish, Osmundo said: "Enough things have been told me now to make me crack you to pieces. While I'm thinking them over, you'd better be saying your prayers and not making me angry."

"With what will you think, brainless one?"

"Keep on," agreed Osmundo grimly, "and soon I will end all your troubles."

He banged his machete down and Nida slid away, around the corner of the table.

"If you don't want to look like that," he said, pointing at the dog fish, "you'd better tell me the truth. If you've been crawling under any bushes with that rat—"

"You stinking block-head!" cried Nida. "You

foul-mouthed, brainless liar! Isn't it bad enough to have a hog like you slobbering all over me?" She caught up a fish spear. "You come any nearer and I'll dig a hole to let out the rottenness in your heart!"

"Go on, if you can," invited Osmundo. "I'm warning you. You can play games with me, do you think? Try it just once. I heard about your getting drunk with Mado Rijo."

Nida dropped the spear to hoot with laughter. Part of it was jeering at him, but part of it was relief, too, for up to that moment she hadn't been sure, and the look in Osmundo's eye went like a cold hand on her spine. In her security, she screamed with unsteady mirth, driven by her relaxing nerves beyond any normal amusement.

Osmundo said, "Laugh, imbecile! But you'd better not get drunk with a real man. That rabbit-lover Rijo would die if one said, 'Pum!' to him, so you can stop that noise, if you're making it because you think I'm worried about him."

"I'll do what I like," retorted Nida. "Get away from there and let me fix your dog fish, which I hope rots."

"That's just where you're wrong," interrupted Osmundo. "If you think I'll have any one else around you, let me see you look at a man. It will

be the last mistake you make on earth." He shot out his hand, covered with fish scales, and seized her wrist. "Maybe you believe me, now?"

"You great animal, let me go! I'm sick of you, do you hear? I'll do what I please!"

She had said that often before. Her speech, like his, fell easiest into violent forms. It was different this time. She hated him, she knew. Accumulated resentment, mounting against his tyranny, broke through now. Doubly intolerable to one who had never known any rule but her own inclinations, the bonds which first unreasonable passion for him had put on her snapped like rotten rope. She said nothing, tugging her wrist free. Formerly she would have continued cursing and shouting at him in an emotional ecstasy at his rage. Now she was through with him. She recognized that it would be both difficult and dangerous; no time to submerge her wits in the high tides of excitement.

Osmundo felt it too, without being acute enough to put his finger on the change. An uneasy awareness that something he did not understand was happening made him pause. Then he said loudly, "You'll be careful—"

He would have said more, had he not seen his father's wide shoulders and big bearded head at

— THE SON OF PERDITION —

the door. Both he and Nida started, and both quieted suddenly, as though cool water were poured into a simmering pot.

"You are always fighting," observed Vidal. "Who is to blame now?"

"She wouldn't clean my dog fish," said Os-mundo sullenly.

"Clean his dog fish," said Vidal. "He needs the skin."

• 8 •

QUINTÍN MEDEROS' goat died.

It was very opportune, for Cuchita wanted a goat. No matter whether the goat was alive or dead, sick or well, so long as it was a whole goat. It would cost ten dollars alive, but dead, Mederos sold it for fifty cents.

Nida knew that Cuchita had killed the goat with a spell. Of course old Mederos could not understand how it happened. Nida sniffed at him, but she did it silently. "You'll want a new goat?" she judged commiserating with him across the back fence.

Quintín Mederos said he was not sure.

"That," admitted Nida, "is too bad, for I know of a fine goat for fifteen dollars. It gives pails of milk at a time. As it happens, it belongs to my cousin up at Esperanza and I could get it for you for ten dollars."

To his protest that the unhappy animal just deceased cost only six dollars, Nida shrugged. "Goats are higher now," she said. "I mentioned it because I am going up there to-day. But it is sometimes wise to wait and decide. You will not lose more than four or five dollars in any case."

She went back to her work in the kitchen. Of course Mederos came hobbling through the gate presently and paid down the ten dollars. Nida went straight to the wharf where her father and Osmundo were getting the nets aboard preparing to go fishing. Now the moon was full and the weather quiet during the last May days they left in the afternoon and slept on the boat, not returning until the next morning. She wanted her father's pass card.

"I will get the gas-car up in an hour, and get the one from Central Chicago back to-night," she said. "My cousin Eloy at Esperanza will sell me a goat for five dollars."

"He may not have any goats to sell now," said Vidal, considering it.

"He always has goats to sell," insisted Nida. "For money he would sell his sister."

"What blockhead wouldn't?" inquired Os-mundo. "Good luck, Goat-Merchant!"

"Be still!" requested Vidal. "You sound more like a pig than a person."

"And so he is," agreed Nida, gratified. "He—"

"And you too be still!" Vidal drew his brows together, running his hand through his heavy hair. He took out of his shirt a sack made of dog fish skin which hung on a cord around his neck. Amid fish-hooks, thread, a piece of wax and his pilot's whistle he found the pass card. "Why are you so anxious to get money?" he asked.

"All respectable people have money in the bank," said Nida sweepingly. "I am going to get all the money I can. I am tired of living in boorishness."

"In what are you respectable?" inquired Os-mundo. "I—"

"Once more, be silent!" thundered Vidal. In his anger was a majestic quality which made them both cower a little. "You will shame my house with your squabbling one time too many," he told

them, "and then we shall see." He looked at Nida and extended the card. "Be out of my sight!" he said.

She took the card and turned away.

"There is no good in money," Vidal said, "but I am not sure that there is any good in women, either."

Nida, tucking the card into her dress, permitted herself the faintest shrug. She made sure, in the corner of her eye, that he was out of earshot. "Very well, my old yokel," she nodded, "we shall see. . . ."

She was scarcely inside the kitchen enclosure when Osmundo came running. He ran in easy bounds, like an animal. "Get me my jacket," he said.

She nodded indifferently, went and took it off the hook, carrying it out into the sunlight again. Osmundo swung it over his bare back and paused.

"Once before," he said, looking meditatively up to the corner of the tiles, "you went away and stayed all night. And do not imagine I can't find out." His dark eyes twitched down and fixed on her. "I don't like the way you act," he said. "For one last time, take care!"

"I shall be on the late car," said Nida. "For

one last time, talk less, or you'll have the old man on you."

"And I might tell him some things, too."

"Oh, ho," nodded Nida, "tell what you dare, my friend. That knife has two blades."

He went back then. She tied a shawl about her head, made sure Mederos' money was safe in her stocking, and walked down to the signal tower where the tracks left the railroad yards, passing onto the flat white arches of the viaduct.

"Where are you going, to Habana?" inquired the assistant yard-master, tilted back yawning in the spot of shade.

"Jump into my pocket, little man, and you might see."

"That's right," agreed the yard-master, "when you go to Habana, you'd better take me. You'd be lost there. City people eat peasants like you alive."

"And when they see people like you, they sweep them up and throw them into the harbor."

"Perhaps. But when I'd shown you where good times grow, little country sister, you'd know more than you do now."

"And maybe I could find them for myself."

The gas-car came down with a clatter from the shops and Nida got on board. So he thought

Habana was a joke, did he? Well, he might be surprised. In not so many years he might come there and see her in an automobile with gentlemen kissing her hand. If he thought city people were so great, he was the one who would know more than he did now. She slipped the shawl off her head to let the cool wind of their progress, humming and rocking up the viaduct, catch at her hair.

The joys of crowds and the pleasures of the city streets were obvious to Nida. So memorable and exciting an escape from her present difficulties made a course worth considering. She did not formulate more definitely than that for she had solid faith in opportunity, a conviction that people of sense need not strive to realize their ends. Knowing what she wanted, she had merely to wait, watchful for the chance.

It was light on such a chance that had just been given her. Casual, unforeseen, like all chances. The man at the switch-tower was right. She would be lost in Habana, and once lost . . .

Clearly it would require many goats sold at a profit to realize any large sum—such as one might in five minutes take out again from the ground under Osmundo's floor. Her anxiety at Sancti Spíritus she remembered well enough, but lost in

Habana, never to see Osmundo again, it would matter very little what he did and said.

She left the gas-car at the Central Espalada junction point, cutting through the brush toward her cousin Eloy's *finca*. Pineapples, she saw. Eloy was always trying something new which was going to make his fortune. She regarded the interminable rows of leaves yellowed at the ends, fanning out from the ground in long spikes, skeptically.

Eloy, tall, thin and nervous, was astonished to see her, but he appeared cordial. "You look more and more like your mother," he declared. "You do not remember her, I suppose." He sighed aimlessly and selected a toothpick from a little china bowl on the table. "I'm growing pineapples now," he said.

"It's a very good business, I imagine," admitted Nida.

"For some people," answered Eloy quickly, struck with consternation lest she be about to ask him for something. "Not for me," he said vigorously. "I am as bare as a stone." He worked a moment with the toothpick, extracting the fragment of food which troubled him most. He regarded it with interest and continued, "I

would have come down to see you, but your father is unfriendly to me. They say that great things have been done at Dosfuegos by the Company. It is a changed place, I'm told. Well, you see, I have my pineapples. They take most of my time. Next year I may try corn, if I can borrow a tractor when the Company plants cane for Central Espalada at Esperanza. Did you know that? A whole new colona. They must have more money than they know what to do with. Where they get it is a mystery to me, with sugar not worth so much sand. I lost a great deal of money on cane four or five years ago. I was wise to give it up. Did you read what President Machado said about growing corn? A very sensible thing. He sent me a copy, or at least he must have instructed the government to. I knew him in 1917, you know. I sold his army some pigs when he had taken to the woods. I could see then he would amount to something. . . ."

Nida felt that this had gone on long enough, but she hesitated to bring up goats too precipitately. She remarked, "Don't you ever wish that you were in Habana again instead of out in the wilderness here?"

"Habana has changed a great deal," announced Eloy. "So people have told me. When I was in

Habana, Don Tomás was president. That was before the Americans came butting in once more. I knew it was coming. I knew Mr. Steinhart and Mr. Magoon, for that matter. If I hadn't been cheated, I would be there still, living in the Vedado, let me tell you."

"Is it very expensive, living in Habana?"

"I have spent a thousand dollars in one night," said Eloy, "and that was nothing. General Pino Guerra, one of my intimate friends, and I used to—"

"I mean, for people who are not so important," interrupted Nida. "When they first come, for instance?"

"It depends upon who you are," answered Eloy. "If you are going to be anybody, you must spend money. Of course, if you are nobody, it does not cost anything in particular."

"I mean, how long could you live on five or six hundred dollars?"

"I couldn't have lived a week," answered Eloy proudly, "but if you went and buried yourself in Jesús del Monte, you might live half a year."

"Then you could live a whole year for a thousand dollars, I suppose."

"There are plenty of people who live on noth-

ing," admitted Eloy, "but they never get anywhere. I may go back when I begin to make a profit on my pineapples, but I shall want more than a thousand dollars."

"Well," said Nida, "would you like to make some money now?"

"I wish I could," sighed Eloy. "I'm a little short just now." He looked at her anxiously, still trusting his first alarm was unfounded.

"If you have a goat you'd like to sell, I know some one who will buy it," declared Nida.

"I have a goat," confessed Eloy, "one of the finest goats I ever saw. I don't know that I want to sell her."

"Probably not," agreed Nida. "I could only pay five dollars."

"This goat I speak of is not that kind of a goat," said Eloy, offended. "I have been offered twenty or twenty-five dollars. I have another goat I might sell for ten dollars. A black goat."

"Black goats are very unlucky. I'm surprised that you keep it around. You ought to be glad to sell it cheap."

"They are not unlucky for me."

"Well, keep the black one then, and I'll give you six dollars for the other."

"Well, I might give you the black one for six dollars. That is, if you had six dollars right here."

"For the black one I'd only give five."

Nida dug into her stocking and produced a damp American bill. "You look at the money and I will look at the goat," she suggested. "Where is she?"

"I don't know," said Eloy uneasily. He was afraid that he was being cheated and it made him nervous. "I don't know that I want to sell her for five dollars."

Nida arose. "Well, let's look at it anyway." She went out of the house toward the end of the portrero where barbed wire was strung between the flourishing mataratone posts of the fence. "That thing?" she asked, pointing. She stopped and tucked the bill into her stocking. "Oh, no, my friend."

"Well, then we might as well go back to the house," said Eloy resolutely.

"And that one over there is your twenty-five-dollar goat, I expect. I might give you five for her."

"I'll give you the black one for five," said Eloy, "but only because you are my aunt's daughter."

"Well, I don't mind doing you a favor. But

you will have to carry it up to the tracks for me.”

“I will drive it up and tie it there. What is the use of carrying it when it has four feet?”

He got a rope and hitched it around the goat’s neck.

The sun was down level now, in their faces as they moved through the pineapple field. “When you make a million from these, I may see you in Habana,” said Nida.

Faced with the proposition so concretely, Eloy wilted. “Well, I don’t know that I shall make a million. Besides, Habana isn’t so much to those of us who know it. You don’t mean that you are thinking of going?”

“Oh, I daresay,” shrugged Nida. “Dosfuegos is not the place I’d stay very long.” She screwed her eyes up against the sun glare as they came down the little depression. “My father might not like it,” she continued, “so I might ask you to help me. I mean, have you ask me up here for a few days, and then I could go from here and he wouldn’t know I had left until I was in Habana.”

“I wouldn’t want him blaming me,” said Eloy nervously. “Is he still friendly with Mr. Stellow? Well, he might get Mr. Stellow to make me trouble. The Company is offended because I

don't grow cane any more, and I happen to owe them a little money—"

"Well, I'm not going right away. I'll talk to you about it another time. I wouldn't want to go without having your advice."

"No," said Eloy, gratified, "that's true. I could tell you a lot of things. Perhaps I could find some way to help you. If you have the money, that is." He looked at her apprehensively. "Of course I couldn't help you that way—not now."

"Oh, I've got the money—in the bank. Plenty of it."

"Well," nodded Eloy, relieved, "I could tell you things. Yes."

He got the goat up onto the platform under the shed of the small station and bent down to knot its legs together.

When he had kissed her good-by and gone away, Nida sat on the edge of the platform swinging her feet while the air cooled and the sun disappeared. The station agent went up and lighted the signal lamps, returning in the early twilight. He had seen the gas-car coming, far away, but he had turned the switch on it, because a Central Espalada train was coming through. Nida saw a star or two now, but she was in no hurry, sitting and thinking about Habana.

The Central Espalada train came at last, echoing deliberately by. The dusk had deepened with tropic suddenness as the fitful headlights of the gas-car advanced. It seemed to Nida that she saw the swift solution of her problems. In prospect, she was replete with the beautiful possibilities of a new and dazzling life.

She arose, stood smiling faintly in the calm pleasure of her certitude. Gazing from the lighted shed at the gas-car, now nearly there, she made out a passenger in the back seat.

— III —

AGUARDIENTE

THE last days of May found Oliver Findley once again in Santa Clara province.

On the evening of May 28th he had left Jaticbonico, the big Cuba Railroad Central, equipped only with a ticket to Nuevitas and the urgent invitation to be gone. Promptly turning in the ticket, he managed to extract the price from the agent, and took the first train through, which was in the opposite direction.

The Habana Express was full of engineers and mill men, sugar boilers and chemists, many of them drunk and all of them with money, returning to Habana and the States at the end of the crop. It would be surprising, Oliver Findley argued, if he could not pick up a little.

He moved steadily through the cars, stopping for a drink at the little corner bar-buffet in each, keeping a lap ahead of the conductor. He paused in the toilet when it was necessary to let him get by. Then he came back again. On the way he appealed frankly to every American he saw, espe-

cially the drunken ones, and was rewarded with relative liberality. "I'm stuck in the middle of this Godawful country and lost my money. Can you help me, Mister. . . ."

They knew what a Godawful country it was, after months on a six-hour shift in some sweating sugar mill.

If he had been able to make the tour once more, he might have got enough to reach Habana, for by that time he knew the ones who would hand out a dollar every time he spoke to them until they hadn't any left. He had not been in Habana for a year, and felt it was time he saw the city again; especially now when Habana would be even richer in momentarily wealthy and drunk compatriots passing through from the mills.

He was cornered first by one of the two soldiers attached to each train. He gave this man a dollar recklessly, trusting the incident would be closed. So it would have been usually. In the case of the present soldier there were complications. Previous to donning the national uniform, he had been employed in an American sugar mill. He had never since lost a chance to establish his relations with Americans on a more satisfactory basis than had been possible at the mill. The third assistant mill engineer had supplied many practical illustra-

tions of how people of no importance could best be made aware of their insignificance. He was an apt pupil even then, and added point had been given not ten minutes before in the express car where two guards were accompanying a shipment of gold consigned to Zaza del Medio. These men wore the uniform and were in the employ of the United Sugar Company. Far from showing deference to the National Army, they displayed a highly American contempt, amounting almost to suspicion, as they invited him curtly to stay away from the strong box. When he tried to take an interest and asked where it was going, they looked at him as if he were a fool and stated briefly that Central Chicago's main line junction was, as all the world knew, at Zaza. They would be highly surprised if the Administrator did not come up on a Central Chicago locomotive for it, as there was more money in the box than the National Army was worth. The soldier retired, smarting. It was then that he found Oliver Findley.

The soldier accepted the dollar, smiled at Oliver Findley unpleasantly, and turned him over to the Jefe of the Train.

Swift calculation made Oliver Findley realize that he couldn't reach Habana. He decided that

there was no sense in buying any lesser transportation. He would be thrown off at Zaza in that case. Zaza was within two hours' walk of Central Tuinucú, one of the Rionda mills. He had not appeared at Tuinucú, where they had treated him very decently, for some years. He doubted if they would remember him. This resolution formed, he announced with firmness and nice courtesy to the Jefe: "No tengo dinero, señor."

The Jefe, in his capacity as chief conductor, was a mild and patient man. The soldier, differently minded, observed: "He's lying," leaning on his rifle and regarding Oliver Findley maliciously.

Oliver Findley was hurt. He could appreciate the shrewdness which the man had displayed in getting a dollar out of him before having him thrown off. Now the soldier had absolutely nothing to gain. What had been good sense became here wanton meanness.

"The Captain," he protested to the Jefe, "is mistaken. I have lost my ticket and I am absolutely penniless."

The Jefe shrugged, leaving it to the soldier.

"This entirely-without-value and unusually

stinking American dog-lover has a pocket full of money which he got by annoying the passengers," asserted the soldier. "If you turn him upside down and kick him a few times, it will fall out all over the floor."

While the idea plainly appealed to him very much, the soldier held his hand, reflecting with a nice Latin sense of the dramatic that such action would fitly conclude a little more formal insulting. If he could make the American attack him, he might even add the pleasure of having him jailed. In the process, some private opportunity could doubtless be found to confiscate any money which this object of safely small importance had begged or stolen.

In justice, the soldier stated, this earth-defiling refuse, the plain result of an informal union between a sewer pipe and a sow, should be forced to pay for its passage from Ciego de Ávila, where it had slopped aboard. "Of course," admitted the soldier, "he will deny it, but I saw him get on there."

Oliver Findley did deny it, promptly and loudly. His experience had taught him that it is not enough simply to refrain from returning the abuse of a person in authority. It is not even good policy to remain silent, for that might be con-

strued as disdain or indifference. No; it was better to say exactly what was expected of him, presenting in regular sequence the openings his persecuter might seek. Very likely the man would become so pleased with his own pertinent wit that he would forget his original intention of forcing the price of a ticket from Ciego de Ávila out of Oliver Findley. Ciego de Ávila being at least five times as far as Jatibonico, where Oliver Findley had actually got on, would be ruinously expensive.

To this end Oliver Findley adopted a cringing attitude. He mentioned the brotherhood of man, the love of God, the blessings of charity. Spanish is especially suitable for such expression. He pictured himself as unworthy of the concern of a prominent railroad man and a captain in the Republic's glorious army.

The Jefe continued to shrug. The soldier set him right on all these points with much obscene and laughter-provoking detail though he allowed the "captain" to pass as being, if not true, at least appropriate. Warming to his task, he launched into a semi-political, semi-patriotic dissertation. He took flaming exception to the attitude of Americans who came to Cuba only to steal the natural wealth of a land more favored than their

own. The particular American in front of him contrasted so pleasantly with the figured tyrant of the north—it was an unkind portrait of an assistant mill engineer supported by traitorous Cubans uniformed as private guards—that his attitude grew almost gay, patronizing.

They were whistling for Zaza now.

Sure enough, the soldier was deciding that probably the amount of money his victim had was small; not enough to balance the pleasure of a lordly indication that nothing about an American could be of value. He pulled his chin. Oliver Findley looked about, simulating shame and confusion.

They went by lines of box cars. Oliver Findley saw a big Central Chicago locomotive steaming under an arc light. The soldier saw it too, and remembered the guards in the express car. They were coasting into the wide gravel platform of Zaza, brightly lighted. Seizing Oliver Findley by the collar, the soldier heaved him outside the car.

“Ay!” he shouted to the train-dispatcher’s office. “Hundred pounds fine American garbage for Zaza del Medio!” and tossed Oliver Findley off.

Oliver Findley tried to fall loose. He was not very successful. He took a hard smash on the shoulder and one knee. His chin ground violently into the gravel. Drawing the lighted cars slowly and then more slowly past him, the train eased to a halt. A crowd of curious people gathered. Realizing that he could devote five minutes or more to explaining for a much larger audience the qualities of his American garbage, the soldier had swung from the train.

It would be impossible to escape this, so Oliver Findley lay and moaned loudly, calculating on the chances of arousing some sympathy. The soldier, making his way through the crowd, kicked him once or twice in the stomach, "to see if he was all right." Noting from the convulsed movements resulting that he was, the soldier launched into his speech, punctuating it with further, more vigorous kicks.

Oliver Findley had planned to lie still, but the kicking was too hard and too well directed. Up to that point he had been protected partly by his philosophy, which made cringing to a foul-mouthed blockhead of a soldier not very difficult, since Oliver Findley was the cleverer man. Mere pain was rendering such a pose impossible. He

was hurt badly and afraid of being hurt more. In his helplessness, he was aware of himself as he was, as he must look to the people gaping at him and the soldier kicking him. He struggled to his knees. The soldier, delighted at the promise of a little action, smashed him down with his rifle butt. Oliver Findley had no recollection of what followed. He heard himself screaming, and he could remember afterwards tearing at the soldier's puttees and metal-toed boots.

Then something had happened. The boots withdrew abruptly, beyond his blind reach. A silence must have fallen, for he heard the crowd murmuring. In the flash of that moment's respite the valor born of exceeding pain and helplessness flowed into him. He came once more to his knees, wincing and twisted. He saw the crowd drawing back; he saw the light reflected on the upper parts of the café and the stores across the road; he saw the hundred bright eyes of the halted train stretched out in the darkness toward the water tower. He spit the blood and gravel out of his mouth and pushed the wet hair from his eyes. By a prodigious effort, he stood erect.

He was ready to kill, driven to the extrem-

ity of the simple choice: being killed, or killing.

It was not the soldier who confronted him.

It was a quiet man in a linen suit, tight-fitted on a big frame. Under a white panama, the face was broad with the red of dangerous anger through a pale tan. Gray eyes, wrinkling at the corners, stared accurately. Amazing immobility. The head broad-browed, with the lean, muscled chin and prominent nose of a bust; the stone bust of a Roman general with Germanic blood. Light fell off one high hard cheek-bone. The intolerant mouth set tighter.

It shocked Oliver Findley into motionlessness to find it where he had expected to find the pinched, slyly dark face of the soldier.

. . . Administrator . . . Oliver Findley's automatic recognition told him . . . big central . . . better get out. . . .

He would have, too. He even moved before he remembered that this time he was not asking for anything; he wasn't appealing to this man. He wanted nothing except that soldier. He raised a hand and wiped the fresh blood from his lips.

"Step aside!" he said shrilly.

The gray eyes, deep under the brows, stared

unmoved. "Just what in hell have you been up to?" asked a voice.

It was a voice of that explicit, easy authority which Oliver Findley had learned to dread; the voice of the man with everything annoyed a little by the man with nothing; insolent in its questioning; threatening in its calm. Only Oliver Findley saw now that whoever this was, he was of no importance. Nobody; the Administrator of some sugar mill lost in the Cuban back country.

"Well?" said the voice.

Oliver Findley stared back. Over the supposed Administrator the lights fell strong, and over a linen-uniformed guard a step behind him. Oliver Findley saw the little gleaming metal letters, *U.S.C.* on the uniform collar, the flat-brimmed hat neat over the grave, docilely obedient face. Oliver Findley looked at them both and suddenly he was enraged—hate, fear, fury at the silent eloquence of their juxtaposition. He looked harder at the guard and said, "You poor time-serving bastard—"

"Shut up!" cut in the voice in front of him.

Oliver Findley felt a quicker whirling in his head. He knew he was going out, but not, by God, before he'd done something to that quiet face slightly red above the black tie. His right

hand started for it as hard as he could drive, but it never got there, for the whirling threw him off into utter blackness.

• 2 •

CENTRAL CHICAGO was a million-bag mill.

Oliver Findley knew sugar mills. He was familiar with scores of them, from Central Boston in the east to Central Galope in the west. Essentially they were the same, but they had their individualities in arrangement, size, and atmosphere. Central Chicago was the largest Oliver Findley had ever visited. With Central Espalada, it formed, he knew, the United Sugar Company's Santa Clara province unit. Central Espalada was a million-bag mill too, but it seldom ground to capacity. The Company had some twenty smaller, less modern centrales in Camagüey and Oriente. Oliver Findley had been invited to leave several of them. The U.S.C. men had always shown remarkable efficiency in shutting him up and passing him on.

He understood it better now, for Mr. Stellow of Central Chicago was plainly the Company's pace-maker. Central Chicago, Espalada, and the Santa Clara marine terminal at Dosfuegos were Mr. Stellow's creation, the summing up of a great Administrator's career, but he had still a hand in every other United mill. With or without instruction from Habana he made unexpected week-end trips. He altered methods, seized on irregularities, and checked off men who would not be back next year.

Stellow of Chicago!

Oliver Findley had been two days at Central Chicago since the night Mr. Stellow brought him down from Zaza del Medio. Neither Mr. Stellow nor his mill interested him during the first one. They had put him to bed in a house, filled as nearly as he could judge from its incidental noises, with American engineers. The Company's doctor looked him over impersonally the second day. To a young man in riding trousers and leather leggings who had come in with him, the doctor observed that there was nothing much wrong. The young man was tall, brown, and rather good looking. He regarded Oliver Findley, candidly curious. Stone was his name. Oliver Findley

placed him unerringly—Harvard Engineering School. He had not been down long, for his Spanish was uneasy and inadequate, addressing a Chinese servant.

The Chinese servant was the head house boy—old, wary and experienced. In his expressionless oriental way he had sized Oliver Findley up. He would give this strangely battered person no chance to get near the men's rooms. There would certainly be things missing. Oliver Findley, watching him from across the bandages on his chin and cheek, commanded his discretion.

Young Mr. Stone said, "If you want anything, just call. He can hear you." Mr. Stone indicated the house boy. "You speak Spanish, don't you?"

"A little," agreed Oliver Findley. "I've been in this country for a good many years." He was feeling all right except for minor aches and stiffnesses. Enough better not to lose any time in arousing Mr. Stone's interest. The young man showed it, struck by an unexpected accent and inflection. "I'm out in the field to-day," said Mr. Stone, "but I'll drop in when I get back and see how you are."

"Nice if you would," nodded Oliver Findley.

Before supper he let young Stone tell him about

Central Chicago and about Mr. Stellow. He noticed with mild amusement that the boy had slipped into the undergraduate's unconscious "sir" in addressing him. Stone was much too well brought up to press Oliver Findley for whatever story or explanation the injured man might have. He'd tell the other engineers and field men at supper that Findley was a damn interesting chap. That would not hurt any. Stone was a bit of good luck.

The China boy brought his supper, hovering around. And so I would, admitted Oliver Findley to himself, if I had any place to put them and your spoons were worth stealing.

He wondered suddenly what young Stone would make of that. A year ago, Oliver Findley guessed, he could have read Stone like a book; predicted his reactions to the dot. The boy was beginning now to get beyond the first clear-cut simplicity of youth and caste. When Cuba was substituted for Cambridge, he hadn't enough personal force to carry on with the stubborn stupidity which made the Anglo-Saxon strong. Stone didn't look very articulate, and it was just as well. He would add substantially to his own confusion if he felt a need to phrase things.

The China boy came back, looked at the tray

with open suspicion and carried it off. It would be amusing, thought Oliver Findley, to contrive to take every spoon in the place and throw them into the cane somewhere on his departure. A few years ago he might have done it. Now, he needed the energy and attention it would require simply to keep himself going. The luxury of amusement waited on that greater luxury, relative freedom from anxiety. He reflected candidly that the only time he was free from anxiety during these later years was when he was drunk. Not having been drunk for almost three days, his mind ran in grim, depressing channels.

He might ask Stone to get him a little aguardiente. It would be better to try the effect of money on the China boy, though. What had become of the clothes he wore he knew no more than whose pajamas were on him now. He hoped his garments had been thrown away, for he needed both a new suit and new shoes—that is, new to me; he modified it. The table by the bed had a drawer. In there he found his dirty dollar bills and the handful of silver. Nothing else. He hadn't had anything else.

By knocking on the bed end with a peso he attracted the China boy's attention. The China boy felt no animosity against Oliver Findley. Un-

guessable and probably awful experiences in the process of setting so many thousand miles between him and whatever swarming yellow city had been his birthplace schooled him in humanity. He knew that men who possess nothing must perforce steal. He did not object to thieves on principle. People who objected to thieves on principle were usually the ones stolen from—such ignorances of life always have their penalties. So long as Oliver Findley did not succeed in stealing from this house, he might do what he pleased. The China boy accepted the reasonable duty of seeing that Oliver Findley got no openings.

He judged gravely that the purchase of a bottle of aguardiente, plus the valuable time of one of his boys going to the tienda, would be worth two dollars.

Oliver Findley admitted that it was moderate. But he had been misunderstood. He didn't require it right now, when they were busy with supper. Later, when it would be only worth a dollar fifty was what he meant.

The China boy was sad. As the señor didn't know this Central, he didn't realize how far it was to the tienda. At no conceivable time would it be worth less than a dollar seventy-five.

Oliver Findley handed over the money. Hav-

ing little enough anyway he didn't regard the saving as important, but the China boy would think of him with greater respect. Possibly less suspicion, too. Men accustomed to coming by their money honestly were identified in point of practical philosophy by the care with which they spent it.

The China boy had gone, but Oliver Findley saw, after a moment, that some one else had appeared in the door.

Oliver Findley was astonished that Mr. Stellow had given him any further thought, beyond instructing a clerk to hand him a ticket to somewhere else as soon as he was out of bed. What he recalled of the Administrator under the station lights at Zaza, what he had heard young Stone relate, impressed him with Mr. Stellow's infinite capacity for the usages of command. It was the one human manifestation of which he had never been tempted to make light. He retired before it, without exercising his gifts for fraudulent dealing and calculated falsehood. He did not respect it, either for itself, or for its rarity, because as far as he knew, he respected nothing, but he recognized the uselessness of withstanding it.

Mr. Stellow, Oliver Findley saw now, was not so tall as he remembered him. He was big,

heavily proportioned, but not fat. His age it would be impossible to guess. You could never imagine him as a child, nor yet as an old man. Perhaps because his features were in themselves unnotable, his gray eyes so noncommittal.

"You ought to be able to get up to-morrow," said Mr. Stellow.

"And out," nodded Oliver Findley. It was a piece of bravado he had not intended.

"And out," agreed Mr. Stellow. "If you have a hard luck story you want to try on me, I'll give you a chance any time to-morrow."

"I'll try to get one ready," said Oliver Findley.

He was astonished to find that Mr. Stellow's presence was stimulating. Talking to him was like—well, it was most like gambling, he thought suddenly. You had the same high sense of potentialities at the click of dice falling.

"By the way," said Mr. Stellow, "what's your name?"

"Oliver Findley."

"Been in Cuba long?"

"Ten or fifteen years."

"Were you ever in Mexico?"

"For a while."

"Oil?"

"And some whiskey."

"Yes, I guess so. All right, Findley. Good night."

At nine o'clock the China boy brought the bottle of aguardiente.

"You want a glass?"

"No. Open it up and stand it by the bed there."

He had the light put out then, so that Stone or some one wouldn't bother him. He let the mosquito netting down and lay in the dark, drinking from time to time.

The nervous exhilaration which his few words with the Administrator had given him faded slowly, ebbing in content. There was an occasional slam of doors and sound of feet. Somewhere in the front of the house a phonograph was playing worn records of dance music. Oliver Findley could hear the sigh like dry rain of wind in the palms.

I feel fine, he thought; I'm all right.

Now the electric light, reflected outside, winked off and on again, to indicate the five-minute period before the mill dynamos shut off power. It gave Oliver Findley a curious idea. I feel all right now, he thought, but that was bad at Zaza. Something got me then.

It might be like the light, steady again, unwavering as it had been all evening in an illusion

of permanence. He watched thoughtfully; time passing, minute by minute. . . .

Gone entirely, without warning. That was the end of it.

He was not disturbed particularly. Interesting. . . .

He drank quietly and comfortably, incurious about to-morrow.

• 3 •

CENTRAL CHICAGO had been shut down for a week, but in the sugar house a fierce activity persisted. Like complicated steel sphinxes the mill units crouched side by side. Mammoth sphinxes, with galleries hanging on their flanks and little groups of men working on the metal strainers under the ponderous triplicate rolls of the crushers—twin twelve-fold crushers, Oliver Findley saw. He admitted that Central Chicago was impressive.

He stood, dwarfed to insignificance among the enormous fly-wheels hanging silent in their railed troughs, and stared up at one of the big traveling

cranes built into the far-off roof, which dangled nooses of steel chain supporting a grooved roller over the masses of Mill number 2. It began to move deliberately, paused; unrolled its chains a little, swinging the steel roller lower. A group of breathless negroes and an American engineer with grease on his white shirt and arms bared to the elbows, stared with him as it hovered into place.

"Good job," said Oliver Findley.

He had a new linen suit and a shave. Except for the piece of plaster on his cut chin he looked presentable, he knew. The engineer turned, inspecting him.

"Yes, sir," he agreed, "but it would be a damn sight better if that ape on the crane would place it the first time."

Oliver Findley made a gesture, disposing tolerantly of all apes on cranes. In his opinion, Central Chicago had the best arrangement he'd seen in Cuba. "Room to move around and see what you're doing. Now at Jatibonico, for instance—"

He had become a visiting engineer, an expert looking over the big Cuban centrales. Obviously a person of importance. The rôle fell to him easily and naturally. So instinctive was such

posing that he fell into it simply for the profitless impressing of this person, whom he would never see again, who could do nothing for him. Technical expert, who knew everything and had seen everything. Cryptic. A few words of praise, out of civility to the people whose place was under inspection. All the while he stared narrow-eyed, noting things that in his opinion were mistakes.

Oliver Findley's eyes went hither and thither authentically, though having spent years avoiding any mechanical knowledge there was very little that he understood. It gave the same effect as understanding everything too well to bother speaking of it. Impressed, the engineer was sketching carefully the difficulty with the rollers they were replacing. Oliver Findley said, "Yes, quite probably."

It made the engineer a little uncomfortable, for he couldn't be sure that Oliver Findley agreed with him. As fourth assistant mill superintendent he felt that he had a great deal to learn, and while he knew his own mill, he gathered at once that Oliver Findley knew hundreds of mills.

It was at this point that the visiting expert saw something needing no mechanical knowledge to understand.

At one end of the roller, the long pendent loop

of chain made a slight movement on the center pin, a quiver and slide on the shining steel, sideways. It began with gentle hesitancy, and for a second Oliver Findley thought it might be all right. In the next second he saw that it was going to be drastically and disastrously wrong.

He gripped the engineer's arm.

"Stand out!" he shouted.

There were three negroes at the pin socket and two of them, old mill hands, knew better than to temporize, whatever the trouble. The third straightened up, hanging the wrench in his dangling black paw, his mouth open with surprise on his white teeth.

He never found out what it was, for the looped chain leaped a little, eased of its ton of steel. Swinging its end down in one convulsive jerk, the roller dropped from the loop at the other end. There was a glimpse of the man, swaying sideways, his knees crumpling. A clap of iron thunder. The very chain on the crane leaped with the vibration. Beyond, a great fly-wheel made an involuntary fraction of a turn. Echoes rolled against the walls and back. The fourth assistant mill engineer stood senseless, staring at three long red splashes on the white of his shirt.

"Get him out of there!" he screamed suddenly.

"Steady, now, steady!" said the visiting expert. "Hang onto yourself! There isn't anything to get out." The visiting expert shook the man hard. "Clear off!" he shouted to the fitting gang. "Down below! Step for it! Camina!"

The negroes stared at the passive roller, lying tilted against the edge of the trough; at the thin brown person who gripped the mill engineer's arm and shouted at them. They went, shuffling down the iron stairs, under the long up-sweep of the twin bagasse carriers, and paused in an aimless herd. Men came running, swarming over the wide cement.

"Turnbull!" somebody shouted.

"Here!" said the man whose arm Oliver Findley held. He looked at Findley. "That's the first accident we ever had in this mill," he said woodenly. "Christ, I wish it hadn't been on my job!"

"You were not to blame," said the visiting expert expertly. "I saw it all. Nothing you could have done. No negligence on your part. No—"

The man coming up the stairs now would be the Mill Superintendent. He was tall and thin, with graying hair along the sides of a well-shaped bald head. The Mill Superintendent's eyes went

to the empty chain loops, the fallen roller, and up again.

"Drop something, Turnbull?"

There was something to be said for alcohol, something to be said for drinking early in the morning. The visiting expert said, "Mr.—er . . ." looking back, still holding Turnbull's arm.

"Mr. Farrell," said the Mill Superintendent.

"Mr. Farrell," echoed Oliver Findley, "I'm sorry to tell you that there was, and one might say, still is, a negro under that."

Mr. Farrell looked at it again and looked away quickly. "How did it happen?" he asked. "Who adjusted those slings?"

"I did, sir," spoke Turnbull, "I saw it put on. I guess it's my fault. I guess . . ."

"Nonsense!" cut in the visiting expert. "Nothing of the sort. The responsibility, if any, rests with the person in charge of the mill." He looked Mr. Farrell in the eye and smiled wearily, hitting out at random. "No business to allow the crane to operate when such a degree of friction had been established on the runners that—er—pendent loads definitely oscillated when in movement."

The Mill Superintendent was taken aback. "I am not entirely sure I understand, Mr.—"

"Findley of Boston," said the visiting expert. He had scored, he saw. "If you do not understand the problems of primary lubrication, it would be a good idea to get some one who did."

"Mr. Findley," observed a voice in back of him calmly, "is experienced, Farrell."

Oliver Findley did not have to turn to know whose voice that was.

"On the strength of Mr. Findley's testimony, we'll dismiss the question of responsibility for the moment," continued the voice. "Drop your chains and get that off, Farrell. Run the morning shift out of here, and I'll send you some guards. I'll be in the office. I'd like a moment with you now, Mr. Findley."

The Administrator replaced a cigar in his strong teeth and turned about, moving down the ladder solidly.

"Allen!" he said, "Fraser! Get these people out of here! Let the number two crew go, and move some mechanics from number one to stand by for Mr. Farrell. Yes, Allen, I'm talking to you!"

He went right on with Findley after him. The crowd melted magically about his advance. They came together into the intense sunlight and across the road toward the office. The screen door

slammed behind them. Mr. Stellow stood still again.

A group of clerks who had gathered at the window dispersed suddenly, sliding back to their desks. Mr. Stellow took out the cigar and put it back again.

After a moment he went on, down the center of the big room, and held a door for Oliver Findley. He made a gesture toward a chair, pressed a switch starting an electric fan and walked behind his desk. He picked up a pile of papers, looked at them a moment, and tossed them into a mahogany tray.

"Well, Findley," he said, "what are you up to now?"

"Nothing," answered Oliver Findley. "If you have any liquor, I'd like a drink."

"Whiskey," said Mr. Stellow, reaching toward a cabinet.

"Keep it."

"What do you want?"

"Aguardiente."

Mr. Stellow pressed a button and spoke to a boy.

"Well," he said, "want me to move out of here and let you run things for a while?"

"Doubt if I could do it so well."

"I suppose you were lying when you told Farrell you knew about cranes?"

Oliver Findley shrugged.

"Turnbull can't work anything for you. He's done for, anyway. No damn good. This finishes him."

"None of my affair."

"Right. Now I wonder why that didn't occur to you earlier?"

"Hell, Stellow, don't you ever get tired of having things occur to you earlier?"

"Just call me Mr. Stellow," requested the Administrator. "A little formality."

"Sorry," nodded Oliver Findley. "I would have, if I expected to be around here long enough to have it make any difference."

"Where are you going?"

"Where my ticket reads to."

Mr. Stellow put his elbows on his desk. The persistent electric fan blew hard above his head, stirring the thin hair. The boy rapped on the door and came in with a bottle.

"That's better," acknowledged Oliver Findley. "I suppose you don't drink, Mr. Stellow."

"You're impudent," said Mr. Stellow thoughtfully. "It doesn't impress me, Findley."

"You asked me to come over here," observed

Oliver Findley, setting down his small glass. "You must have wanted something. You must have wanted something when you brought me down here from Zaza. You must—"

"I don't 'must' anything," corrected Mr. Stellow. "Findley, I don't like Americans like you around Cuba."

"Giving proof through the night that the flag is still there?"

Mr. Stellow considered him. "Yes," he agreed finally, "you might put it that way. You aren't much of an advertisement. Now in one sense that isn't my business. But I don't like my niggers to see an American like you. Gives them ideas. Bad for Morale. Ever hear that before?"

Oliver Findley nodded sympathetically. "When they say 'American,' " he guessed, "they've got to think of a big hard-boiled boy in a white suit running things."

"No dramatics, Findley."

"Funny position, yours," suggested Oliver Findley, filling his glass again. "An odd idea, but it looks as if I had the drop—"

"A little too optimistic, Findley. . . ."

That was true. Still supported by an exaltation,—alcohol; the irony of his own position; perhaps most, the irony of sudden death, death with

careful selection annihilating the harmless or the innocent (probably the black man had an extensive black family)—he was conscious of snatching a few last things under Mr. Stellow's nose.

The Administrator appraised it too. He said: "Stop drinking before it gets worse." He lost some of his machine-like precision; not enough to make him lose his temper, to become entirely human. Not so human and unjust as death. "I know you're no good." He was summing up. "You can't live without liquor, and you're a liar and I presume a thief. I don't hold that against you, only it's not much of a recommendation."

Recommendation? Mr. Stellow thought in terms of human economy, Oliver Findley supposed. Applying things to their ends. Soberness, truthfulness, honesty, must be to him materials, like mortar and steel. Not, however, like the sugar he made. That was a product. Mr. Stellow went right on to say so. "You can't put a drunkard at anything that requires attention and alertness. You can't put a thief where you won't be able to watch him. You can't deal with a liar in matters where the facts are important. Well, what can you do with him?"

"Nothing," said Oliver Findley. Mr. Stellow

had moved the bottle away, so he arose ironically.

"I get a ticket, I suppose," he said.

"Do you speak French?" asked Mr. Stellow.

"Perfectly."

"Not quite perfectly, I guess. But if you can speak it at all I could use you for a day or so."

"Well enough," said Oliver Findley. "I haven't spoken it for a good many years. I spoke it pretty well once."

"You can stay here for a week. It's not very important. Some one who is looking at sugar mills. From Guiana, I was told. He's coming through from Habana. He speaks very little English and no Spanish."

Mr. Stellow paused. "No one but a Frenchman would have the brass—" he judged. "I'd like somebody to be able to say something to him."

"I'll be repaying my debt of gratitude to you?"

"No. I'll give you a ticket to Habana and fifty dollars. I believe you, because I think you probably would be able to. If I find you're lying, I'll have the guards take you for a ride and I doubt if you ever feel like going near a United mill again when they finish with you. Or would you rather have a ticket to Nuevitas this afternoon?"

"I'll stay," agreed Oliver Findley. "I've been taken for a ride before."

"Now," said Mr. Stellow, "I know you're lying. The worst ride you ever got was at Zaza the other night. How did you like that, by the way?"

Oliver Findley looked at him with slant-eyed amusement and nodded faintly.

"You think it's funny, do you? You didn't think it was so funny then, I noticed. You must get a lot out of it to keep on doing it."

"I don't 'must' anything," said Oliver Findley. "That's one thing I get out of it, Mr. Stellow."

He wasn't sure, as he went out, that he understood Mr. Stellow—the man, that was, apart from the Administrator, the individual in contradistinction to the United Sugar Company. It was probably a shift from one to the other; from the Company, which asked what could be done with a liar and a thief, to the individual who tried to find a use in the face of that absolute nothing. A curious unemotional sympathy which would wish, for reasons too hard to guess, to give a human being a break where it was possible without hampering the Company. He wondered, struck by the thought, if Mr. Stellow, after these many years, had reached a point where he needed to be-

lieve that a human being could hamper the Company.

Not that Oliver Findley seriously cared. He didn't make the error of thinking you could really understand people. You simply lined them up with yourself and judged. He was reminded of the once popular pictures showing ocean liners standing on their sterns next to tall buildings. You did get an idea, but not a very practical one, as you never saw a steamer standing up, or a skyscraper lying down.

He walked over to the tienda, moving comfortably in the hot sunlight, to have another drink.

The long bar, behind the faded blue arches, was dark. A negro came in with him and took up a water jar, raising it and catching the thin stream, falling from the little spout, in his mouth. It suggested to Oliver Findley disjointedly Mr. Stellow's remark—"you must get a lot out of it to keep on"—the negro drinking his water looked so perfectly at ease, untroubled, a humble sample of the world of people who had made their adjustment, their reconciliation. The black man grinned at Oliver Findley and went out again, bending his head, shaped like a black egg under the tight fuzz of hair, into the intolerable brightness of the sun shafts beyond the paseo.

Oliver Findley took another drink, remembering that he still had money. Otherwise it would have been time to devise some scheme for slipping out without paying. A pale blonde boy, in a striped American shirt with the collar band turned in, attended the bar informally. A *rubio*. Blondes were much esteemed by the women.

"It's hot," he said in English to Oliver Findley. All the English he knew, no doubt. He was gratified to find that he was understood, and smiled.

Oliver Findley in a comfortable haze, felt kindly. Interested, too. Relieved of anxieties about himself, he had time for other people. He suggested that such a good looking chap would have things pretty much his own way with the local girls. The boy admitted it without false modesty. Not local, however. "You have to go to Sancti Spíritus," he pointed out, "Meestair Stellow vigila—keeps an eye on, Chicago. . . ."

A very moral man, Mr. Stellow, proposed Oliver Findley.

The blonde boy shrugged politely. "I think it is more good order," he offered.

One would be permitted to guess that Mr. Stellow had his lapses? The blonde boy stated that man was mortal, so he could not be sure, but he

thought, no. "If so, I have never heard anything about it," he added frankly. "But I do not think he has any objection to other people doing what they see fit."

Oliver Findley leaned on the bar and looked interested so the boy continued. "At Dosfuegos, where I come from, he does not interfere, because of the sugar boats, although he has more police there than at Central Chicago, even." He went on to say that his own first connection with the United Sugar Company had been as a guard at the sea terminal, and they had never been instructed to interfere. "Mr. Stellow is such a good Administrator because he understands how things are," concluded the boy.

"The Company owns the cantina here?" guessed Oliver Findley.

"The Company owns everything here," said the boy, smiling, "but none the less, I would be honored if señor would drink with me."

Oliver Findley nodded, amused.

"I am not allowed to drink," confessed the boy, "when on duty. I have to watch out for old José. He is the Superintendent of Stores. What Mr. Stellow tells him, he does, you can believe. Just the same, a man has his freedom." He filled the glasses. "Are you going to be here long, señor?"

Oliver Findley had been gazing at the bright arch of sunlight on the stone flagging. It had been empty and yellow a moment before. Now he was puzzled in a hazy way to see it neatly occupied by a black silhouette. He looked and looked again. The head moved a little, bringing a hard shock of recognition. He started, raising his glance.

"Well," said Mr. Stellow thoughtfully, "I thought I might find you here, Findley."

Oliver Findley bowed slightly, still leaning on the bar. Mr. Stellow's hands had been thrust into the pockets of his coat. He removed one and jerked his thumb, looking past Oliver Findley to the blonde boy, who had paused, aghast.

"You're fired," said Mr. Stellow. "Tell José to shoot on some one else and pay you off."

The boy set down his glass shakily. Mr. Stellow moved his head a little. "Don't start talking," he said. "Come on, Findley, you have an engagement up at the club."

Findley straightened up. "Good-by, chico," he said.

The blonde boy nodded mechanically.

Oliver Findley felt in his pocket and counted out the pesetas. "Three," he said. He threw down another coin. "It's on me," he said. "Drink

your drink, chico, and we'll have one more before we go."

Mr. Stellow gazed at them. "You might as well, boy," he observed. "You might as well get what you can out of him."

• 4 •

MID afternoon.

Oliver Findley had probably been asleep. He was sitting in a rocking chair on the porch of the engineers' house and the sun had got far enough to strike on him. He stirred and stood up, blinking at the fierce reflection of the crushed white limestone road below. No one was in sight.

He walked down to the screen door slowly, thinking of getting a glass of water. Inside it was still, and not much cooler. He went past the bedroom doors, down the side of the bare cement-paved patio toward the kitchens. Here, sure enough, was the China boy, hunched asleep in a chair with a copy of the *Heraldo de Cuba* sliding off his lap, his gnarled yellow hands hanging, his

mouth open to make a strongly marked map of wrinkles on his wide face, usually so vacant. He looked at least three hundred years old.

Oliver Findley did not awaken him. He got his water and went up the patio. Not a sound. He wondered if he wanted to go to the tienda bar, but he felt too content to bother.

They had comfortable quarters here, he saw, glancing into a bedroom whose door had been left open. High blue walls up to the peaked roof, far enough above to stave off the sun's heat. On the bureau he noticed a few photographs—those photographs always so depressingly plain, which were tolerated because they represented mothers and brothers, or girls so little sought-after that they had become engaged willingly to men most of the year absent. On a table were papers and a few dull books. Oliver Findley saw too a pig-skin wallet, and quite automatically he glanced about and stepped into the room.

In the wallet he discovered six American ten dollar bills, and he appropriated two of them. One flap had an isinglass face with a Harvard bursar's card under it. H. E. Stone. *The student will please show this card when requested by an officer of the University.* Poor Stone! He

was far enough from that possibility now. Oliver Findley laid it down and turned about.

He got rather a shock, for the China boy was standing in the door. The old yellow face was again vacant, but the wrinkled right hand held one of those small eight-shot Spanish .22 revolvers. They looked at each other without a word and finally Oliver Findley shrugged a little.

It was weariness, he knew, and a depressing resignation. At an earlier period he would have reflected that such revolvers even when they didn't miss fire, were negligible weapons. Quick action would put the China boy temporarily out of the way and let him get off. Not now. It meant days of difficult cautious movement through the cane, an alertness and endurance which he could no longer muster. He didn't even feel the desire to talk out of it, deny or explain.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked.

"We will talk to Mr. Stellow about that," answered the China boy politely. He raised his voice, calling. A door slammed and a gigantic person in a sweat-soaked undershirt and soiled white apron appeared. The cook. This man took the revolver and nodded. The China boy slipped away.

"Well, we might sit down," suggested Oliver Findley.

"If you like," agreed the cook. He looked at the revolver a moment and put it in his back pocket, folding his arms on his chest and gazing stolidly in front of him. Quite right, admitted Oliver Findley. A revolver would simply hamper the use of those awe-inspiring hands, in event of any difficulty.

Oliver Findley had no intention of making any difficulty. When they said he was to come, he came. He was sorry, though, when he was led into Mr. Stellow's office, to see that young Stone himself was there, standing nervously by the window. A couple of guards in their linen uniforms, too, and that gave Oliver Findley another sort of turn. The obvious possibility that his departure would take the form of a "ride" hadn't occurred to him. He did not like it, now that it had.

The wallet had been laid in front of Mr. Stellow and some one closed the door.

Mr. Stellow was unmoved, almost as expressionless as the China boy, now relating rapidly what had occurred. There was a difference, of course, and Oliver Findley tried to define it; an effort, not very successful, to keep his mind off the quiet guards waiting. Late, flat sunlight came through

the two western windows and lay on the floor. It was warm on Oliver Findley's feet, but the rest of him was cold.

Mr. Stellow's face was a mask.

Oliver Findley decided that the China boy's was simply an expression of his innate expressionlessness—that wasn't very good, but after all, it didn't matter whether it was good or not. By sundown he supposed nothing much would matter to him and the imminence of it attacked his indifference, tore at it, tightening his breath, and made sweat run in his palms.

"Well, Findley?" said Mr. Stellow.

Stone turned at the window with a strained movement. "Findley didn't take anything," he said, "that was all the money there was in it."

He said it with a ludicrously earnest passion, as though he thought some one would believe him. "There were only forty dollars," he repeated. His voice was high and sounded absurd, as absurd as his whole contention. Mr. Stellow said nothing, so Stone went on, "I counted them, and they're all there."

Oliver Findley, who had spent years in adroit efforts to win for himself just such illogical and mistaken sympathy, shrank away from this artless manifestation. He guessed he must like Stone,

for he felt ashamed, ashamed to see the boy make such a fool of himself in front of all these men. His thought, quailing a moment before at what might happen next, recovered an unexpected insight. Stone was too young to bear this particular bit of human degradation. Here, thought Oliver Findley, in a setting still badly grasped and alien, where no officers of the University were concerned about him, he had nothing to brace himself on. He did not understand Mr. Stellow; he found the impersonality of the United Sugar Company appalling. The language, the climate, his companions, were all incomprehensible. Worse than that, he had begun to find himself incomprehensible. Through the dirt, the rags, the degeneration of years, Stone recognized in Oliver Findley the remnants of a caste, a training and a background which seemed to Stone natural and right. He had greeted and cherished it, as a bewildered tourist in a foreign land speaks to a fellow-countryman whom at home he would never have known.

Oliver Findley supposed he shared the boy's obscure fellow feeling, for that small and negligible misery moved him.

Mr. Stellow raised a hand, checking Stone, who

had opened his mouth again. "That will do," he said. Stone closed his mouth.

Oliver Findley felt in his pocket and took out the two ten dollar bills, dropping them on the desk.

"Well," said Mr. Stellow, "I don't see how we can keep you around here, Findley."

One of the guards shifted his boot and the spur made a small scratching sound on the tiles. Oliver Findley started and moistened his lips hastily. "Listen," he said with a little motion of his hand, "I made a mistake, Mr. Stellow. There's the boy's money. For God's sake let me get out of here."

"There won't be any trouble about that," nodded Mr. Stellow. "Only I'm going to make sure that you never turn up at a United central again." He folded his hands on the desk.

Oliver Findley had a horrible melting sensation inside him. His voice had gone to a whine, he knew, but he didn't care. He turned his head as far as possible, so even in the corner of his eye he couldn't see the uniforms by the door. "For God's sake, have a heart, Mr. Stellow!" His voice was coming in tight gasps. "Can't you just let me walk out of here? What did I ever do to you? I didn't want to come here!"

"Not quite right," corrected Mr. Stellow. "I

asked you this morning whether you wanted to get out or stay. You stayed."

"Sir—" began Stone unexpectedly.

"We'll excuse you now, Stone."

Mr. Stellow gestured and the China boy touched the big cook's arm. Young Stone was red to the eyes. The three of them went out together. Remaining was only Mr. Stellow behind the desk and the two guards at the door.

"For God's sake—" articulated Oliver Findley. "Mr. Stellow, for God's sake—"

"Cut it out!" suggested Mr. Stellow. He reached and pressed a button on his desk. "Findley!" he added sharply.

"Yes, sir."

"I'll give you your choice. You can go down on the gas-car to the sea terminal this afternoon. The day after to-morrow we've got a sugar boat for Bordeaux. I'll give you an order and you can go with it. They'll see you get ashore all right."

He stopped, clasping his hands slowly. "I don't believe you'll ever get back to Cuba again," he said. "That's all I care about, Findley. Wherever you go there'll be trouble, and it's not going to be here. It's too late to make you over, Findley."

A change close to expression had moved Mr.

Stellow's face; nothing direct, like pity or indignation. Only a trace of a sag, a contraction of the gray eyes. He made a gesture and the guards turned quietly, going out to the porch. On the floor the flat sunlight had disappeared. Oliver Findley stood dumbly in the shadows, even his own relief lost in this final astonishment.

For the first time he saw Mr. Stellow as a person. He saw him in the ultimate, incredible obviousness of a human being apart from his position, divested of the small excrescences of habit and particular personality. Mr. Stellow was old, simply, and tired; as all men must be sooner or later. In the Administrator's last words had been also his own epitaph, and all his life, all that the eye had seen and the brain considered, could serve him no better than to make him understand it.

"Have a cigar, Findley," said Mr. Stellow. "I'll tell them to give you fifty dollars when they put you ashore, and since you speak French, you might be fixed worse.

"What I mean about you," Mr. Stellow continued, shaking out the match, "is that the only way you can live is by taking things for nothing. Somebody always gets left."

Oliver Findley raised the cigar in his thin hand and pulled at it.

Mr. Stellow still held the end of the wax match, and now he tossed it aside. "Make up your mind, Findley," he said, "because if you don't want to go to France, my guards are outside there, waiting to take you for a ride."

• 5 •

TWILIGHT was settling down as the gas-car stood at the switch. The light of the signal tower was a mild, liquid crimson against a sky still pale with very few stars. From Central Espalada a sugar train was coming through. You could hear its quick metallic pants and see the blur of its headlight moving around the turn in the thin woods.

Oliver Findley was not impatient. He had sat just as he was now, his legs stuck out before him, lighting cigarettes and finally crushing them dead on the floor ever since they had left Central Chicago. In front was a boy who drove the car, and a company guard with a Winchester laid on his knees. These two did not speak to him, under-

standing that something was wrong, but they showed him no animosity either.

"It's one of Espalada's new locomotives," observed the guard to the driver, "hombre!"

"They are just the same as the new Chicago locomotives," said the driver, unconcerned. "Besides, this is not one of the new ones. It is number five. Your eyes are bad, chico."

"Much you know about it!"

"That's your idea. On number five my cousin is the engineer." He stood up as the long engine came by onto the track ahead. "Ay, Juan!" he shouted. A flare of fire-light and a figure in the squat cab waving down. "Que va, primo!"

"Well, tell him to keep his pig of a train moving," said the guard, disgruntled. "We'll never get in."

Oliver Findley drew a breath. Suddenly he was wistful at their assurance; their trivial security; the interests, the inane arguments and familiar details of their aimless content. Past him flashed in slow succession the long column of box cars: *U.S.C. Central Espalada, U.S.C. Central Espalada, U.S.C. Central Espalada. . . .*

A curious image came to Oliver Findley. Every one was aboard it:—Mr. Stellow, Stone; poor shocked Turnbull, the guards, the driver, every

one—*U.S.C. Central Espalada, U.S.C. Central Chicago, U.S.C. . . .* all except himself. He watched it pass, strong and safe in its purpose and determined end, while the night settled down on him, leaving him uncertain, far from any home.

Now it was past and the signal light twitched, glowing emerald. The gasoline motor awoke. They moved forward again. A little shed, partly a house, with lighted windows, and a platform came up beyond the switch. A man with an official looking cap on his thick hair swung out a lantern. The driver pulled to a halt, his engine running, but the guard said, "We don't take any one. We're a special."

Down the track the lights ending the sugar train grew fainter, smaller.

In the shed a girl started up. "You take me, Señor Big-talk," she said. Out of the front of her dress she jerked something and thrust it into the guard's face. The station agent raised his lantern and the light fell on it. Oliver Findley could see it from his place in back—a blue cardboard special pass with a black letter United Sugar Company and a small photograph.

"And this is you, I suppose?" said the guard haughtily, tapping the photograph. It was a man.

"*Y suya familia!*" cried the girl. "You cannot

read, perhaps. You are illiterate. I might have known from your stupidest of possible faces! That's all right. Educated people can tell you. If you are not paralyzed, get my goat; it's too heavy for me!"

"I don't see anything about goats," said the guard elaborately, "but from this old nanny"—he tapped the photograph again, "herds of goats might well spring. Bring on the little brother yourself."

"You'd better shut up," whispered the driver to the guard. "Monaga. See? Monaga."

"I'll get your goat, señorita," offered Oliver Findley, standing and moving along the bench.

The girl, waving her hands, was escorting Oliver Findley to the corner of the shed where a black goat with legs tied neatly together reposed on her side, wagging her head.

"What about Monaga?" grunted the guard.

"Listen, chico, he is Mr. Stellow's friend. Very good and old friend. You haven't been down to the terminal much. You'd better let Nida alone."

"Much Mr. Stellow would care for this riff-raff!"

"Live and learn, Don Glorioso. You'd better ask her pardon, or she may make you sorry."

"Ave Maria!"

“Dig your own grave then, and good sleep to you!”

Oliver Findley with the goat, now noisy and struggling, on his shoulder, came onto the car and eased the animal down.

“Give me my card!” said the girl, turning to the guard, “before some of the filth, of which you are made, comes off on it!”

“Be seated, señorita,” said the driver, anxious not to be involved.

“I will sit with this kind gentleman, and not with rubbish. Now get on in the name of God!”

She pushed back her shawl a little and smiled admiringly on Oliver Findley. Oliver Findley made her a little bow and they sat together on the last seat while the light fell away behind and the night air quickened about them.

• 6 •

THE girl wanted to talk to him.

Oliver Findley, adroit at grasping attitudes and atmospheres, stirred himself from the quiet

trance of his trip down. He could not see her face now, but the driver's remark, conveying clearly some special importance about her, had made him examine her carefully in the poor light of the little station shed.

He gazed out into the moving dark, confident that behind that face was curiosity which would presently get the better of her. The night, he saw, so clear a little while ago, was growing heavy down here toward the coast. From the southwest stars were gone as though hidden by a prodigious range of mountains. The new, peculiar closeness in the air contributed an illusion of valley depths, black slopes and breath-taking summits heaping up along the track. Storm must be gathering on the sea. It made him think of shelter when he should arrive. Perhaps he could get it from these Monagas, whom Mr. Stellow apparently esteemed. That would amuse him. He turned a wordless, receptive attention on Nida. She responded to it in a moment, saying without hesitation, "You are from Habana, señor?"

She wanted him to be, he felt at once, so he admitted it. He smiled in the thickening darkness and knew his studiously casual voice carried the smile with it, for hers, answering, conveyed her satisfaction.

In front, the guard shifted the metal butt of his rifle on the floor. "We're running into something," he judged, just audible above the sound of the wheels. Both he and the driver looked about at the night, disliking it.

The driver pushed his gas down all the way, frankly anxious to get through these unpleasant swamps, safe where there were lights and people. In comforting acknowledgment the motor roared higher. Splashed by the headlights, the under parts of miserable trees and brush passed in accelerated panorama. The whole machine rocked a little more.

"Well," said Nida, "I suppose you don't think much of us out here."

Oliver Findley considered the face he had seen thrust forward under the station lamps. He said, "No, not much, señorita."

She did not answer anything, balancing annoyance for a moment against curiosity driven deeper. He had been right, Oliver Findley recognized, for she flared suddenly. "I wonder why you did not stay there, then, since you're too good for us?"

Sheltering a match, Oliver Findley lit a cigarette. In the cup of his hands the light rose, falling on his face, and he smiled insolently. He

puffed once on the cigarette, glanced at its bright end, and extended it to her in the darkness.

"Allow me, señorita," he said.

For a moment he wondered if she would take it. Then her hand touched his, the fingers closed on the cigarette. "Many thanks, señor," she said sullenly.

Oliver Findley leaned back, twisted down a smile in the darkness and found another cigarette. As he lit it, he turned his eyes on her, glinting in the small glow. "You do not mean to say *you* live out here, señorita?" Like the light gilding his face, irony gilded the words. Both ended together. In the ensuing blackness Nida spoke. "You need not make fun of me, señor. I am not one of your city girls."

Oliver Findley waved the cigarette in an apologetic arc, answering nothing. Nida maintained her resentful silence as long as she could. "No, no," she said at last, "I'm not nearly good enough for you, I expect."

"Now, señorita, you are making fun of me. You are angry with me."

"And why should I not be?" snapped Nida. "You amuse yourself by insulting me. I do not care to talk to you any more."

Oliver Findley settled back, drawing his ciga-

rette scarlet in the dark and peering into the night. In front the guard and driver talked together, helping each other to resist the nervousness bred by storm coming.

"These machines have good motors," said the guard.

"Yes," admitted the driver, "but I don't like to run them so fast. They're too light. If you hit anything on the track—" Concrete danger helped to nerve him against the unreasonable, disembodied danger he felt in the dark. By delicate manipulation he managed to advance the speedometer a point or two. "That's as fast as it can do," he told the guard.

"If you do not care to be friendly with me," said Nida grudgingly, "God knows you do not have to, señor." She had become slowly sure that she could not allow the city man to make a fool of her so easily. After all, he was a man, like other men, for all his airs.

Oliver Findley agreed. "Very well, let's be friendly."

In the dark he put an arm around her.

Nida threw it off. "You city people should learn better manners, señor."

"My error, señorita," acknowledged Oliver Findley.

"You do not have to put your arm all around my neck to be friendly," Nida instructed him. She was encouraged and it crept into her voice. Oliver Findley said at once, "Well, just how far around may I put it, señorita?"

"Not at all, señor!" said Nida, but she offered no resistance when he did. She even laughed a little, finding the complexity of this form of approach interesting.

"We shall be in presently," said Oliver Findley. "That is too bad, just as we were getting friendly."

"Be kind enough to take your hand off my knee, señor," requested Nida. "You are not back in Habana now."

"You will at least do me the honor of having supper with me?" asked Oliver Findley.

"There is nowhere to have supper," said Nida. "You do not know Dosfuegos, señor." She struck his hand sharply.

"A thousand regrets," sighed Oliver Findley.

"But since my family is not at home," pursued Nida, "I suppose I could give you a bit of bread and rice, if you aren't so haughty that you do not eat peasant's food, señor."

— IV —

NOT ISCARIOT

WHEN Quintín Mederos lost his goat he had been inclined to take it as natural bad luck. Nothing to be done, except get another one. Quintín was an old graying man with a twisted foot. The curious limp it gave his walk seemed to have something in common with a mental limp, a painfully slow and uncouth movement of thought. The goat was dead. Cuchita Hervas wanted to buy it. What she did with dead goats was none of his business or interest. As a matter of fact, he was fortunate to be spared the trouble of throwing it away, a business made unnaturally difficult by the Company's refusal to allow dead animals or indeed, any refuse, to be tossed into a convenient corner and left for the buzzards. Hence, when Pepe Rijo, hearing of the accident, warned him officiously that the carcass must be taken to the incinerator, he was able to reply that this would be impossible. He enjoyed Pepe's bluster for a few moments before explaining that it was impossible because Cuchita had it.

That might have been the end, had not Pepe been sufficiently piqued to continue his official questioning. "How did the goat die?" he demanded importantly.

Quintín Mederos replied that there was no way of telling. "She lay down and died," he explained.

"Maybe she had a disease that might spread," pronounced Pepe Rijo. "We shall look into that."

Quintín Mederos glanced at him with contempt. He knew, he informed Pepe, forty-five thousand times as much about goats and diseases as Pepe could ever hope to learn. "The goat was all right," he repeated. "She just died. That was the will of God, and no disease."

"So she just died, and then Cuchita bought it. How did Cuchita know it was dead?"

"How do you know it's dead?" asked Quintín somewhat rudely.

"This is a serious matter, chico," warned Pepe. "It looks very much to me as if Cuchita had some interest in the goat dying. What do you think of that?"

Quintín thought very little of it, as he made plain. "What would Cuchita kill a goat for?"

"Ah," nodded Pepe, "and what would she buy a goat for?"

"Because she wanted it, I suppose," said Quintín, unabashed by inanity.

"Well, then," triumphed Pepe, "if she wanted it, why wouldn't she kill it first? It would be much cheaper."

"That's true," confessed Quintín finally. "I only got fifty cents. I am paying ten dollars for a new one."

"Well, my friend," said Pepe, "it's no concern of mine, but I have a pretty clear idea how that goat died."

"And how could she kill it?" jeered Quintín doubtfully. "It is never outside my fence."

"The evil eye," explained Pepe promptly. "She walked by one day and looked at it. After that it died."

"Why, then she could kill any one!" marveled Quintín with the inexorable logic of the slow witted.

"Just so, my friend," agreed Pepe. "She might just as likely as not kill you. Especially now, when you might make her trouble. Well, you'd better not say what you know."

Quintín was as much upset as Pepe wanted him to be. Quintín clung to life with ferocity, despite his age and infirmities. He was not a religious man, except in the sense that he was the victim of

any superstition plausible to a mind of no accomplishments. As far as he knew, death put an end to the various small and obscure satisfactions of existence. Just as his goat, being dead, was cast aside and sold for fifty cents, so might he be, for he felt intuitively that the goat and he, whatever their formal diversity, were fashioned from the same perishable stuff.

Pepe Rijo, satisfied to have bolstered up his sense of importance with the shattering of Quintín's insulting calm, went his way.

Quintín remained sitting on his doorstep, rubbing his hands shakily together. Figuratively, he retreated; ran panic-struck down the blind alley of his thoughts, and coming quickly to the end, turned and saw himself trapped, with Cuchita's sunken face and horrible eyes drawing near to serve him as she had served the goat. Slow sweat appeared in beads on his forehead under the wisps of coarse shaggy gray hair. He got up and limped quickly into the house, closing and barring the door, pushing shut the blinds. He felt a little better then, since for the moment he was safe, but he saw, with slow and terrifying despair that it was only for the moment. Cuchita, he considered in terms of himself—logically. He realized that one who possessed the power of killing with a glance

would enjoy using it too much ever to forget or forgive as other people in their laziness might.

Sitting with his arms locked tight around him for additional protection, Quintín stared into the gloom of the shuttered room. The sweat continued to bead on his forehead and presently to run on his face. His mouth was dry inside and drawn. His eyes swelled out of his head in a torment of thought.

It came to him gradually, the awful truth that as long as Cuchita and he were in Dosfuegos, there could be no end to his peril. In this extremity the dazzling idea dawned on him that by beginning promptly enough he might get rid of Cuchita before she had the opportunity to finish him.

He caught at it in a frenzy of hopelessness, carried beyond the recognition of its danger, perhaps its impossibility. He suffered the sort of mental anguish a man stepping out on a buccaneers' plank might feel—if he walked, he drowned; if he stopped, he was shot. The human mind makes nine men out of ten walk, for the immensities of fatuous hope pour into those few additional seconds. The eventual garotte for murder weighed less with Quintín than the immediate death by sorcery. So thinking, he would have been ready with knife or gun. He even went so

far as to search for a knife before he reflected that it would be almost impossible to stab Cuchita without giving Cuchita a chance to see him. It meant he would have to go and seek Cuchita.

He gave up his search then, sitting down helpless and shaking. His mind broke to pieces, so he simply shook and stared and sweated, empty of ideas; doubly empty of hope. An hour wore on in the shadowed room. There were voices in the afternoon blaze of the sandy street; locomotives were moving in the railroad yards. Motor launches passed on the river behind, and every sound added to his confusion. In a stillness, you could listen for approaching danger, and though you died to hear it, it did offer some warning. Now, were he to open his door, it might be to face Cuchita, standing waiting for him.

He saw finally that he must make Cuchita die without being there, and seeing that, he saw a more glorious possibility. If that could be accomplished, who would know he had done it? Just as Cuchita had killed the goat, and no one knew it but himself and Pepe Rijo, if Cuchita died while he was sitting quietly at home, one fork of his dilemma broke and disappeared. There was no judge, no executioner.

His mind, turning in an ecstasy to this relief,

seemed to become whole again, shrewd and active. There were other ways than the evil eye to cause death after you were safely past, ways better than the evil eye; ways which you need not even risk a meeting to compass. He had worked on the piers enough to see the results of one way. At night you scattered a powder in heavy lumps from a big yellow barrel. In the morning there were dead rats everywhere, rats who ate and died in the night. Rats probably ignorant of how they died.

If Cuchita could be caused to eat that. . . .

• 2 •

THAT night Fray Alejandro, in the office at the end of the pier, picked at the keys of a typewriter while fans hummed in the paralyzing atmosphere. Eager insects thumped on the long screens. At the desk by the far end, two certified accountants from Habana, who had been all day auditing the books of the Dosfuegos branch of the Bank of the United Sugar Company, were now being good enough to spend the evening checking over the pier accounts.

This was very leisurely and informal. The clerks had gathered, watching them, and they drank beer and told dirty stories between pages—periodic bursts of laughter, clouds of cigar smoke waving up into the hot air, the splutter of beer bottles being opened.

Outside, in the mammoth cave of the wharf, a night shift was finishing the loading of a sugar boat, a British steamer destined for Bordeaux. Electric cranes creaked and whined under the white funnels of arc lights. Jerking their trains of trailers, little electric trucks bumped and rattled. Dockhands shouted and the thin commanding whistles of foremen at the controls pierced the din cleanly. A sugar train from Central Espalada was in, calling sonorous through the thick night.

And such a night! The impenetrable thickness weighed down, louder in stifling quiet than all the clamor of this activity. It pressed like a hand on the whole small sand bar of the sea terminal with its superstructure of steel and concrete, its turning machines and flooding white lights. Men working, sweated and struggled for breath, uneasy and quarrelsome. It was bad, with a waking apprehension of worse coming, some fury out of the Caribbean advancing on them like a hunter on a sprung trap.

Fray Alejandro was ill at ease too. That black heaviness must have found place in his heart, for he was filled with unreasonable sorrow, resting his blunt fingers on the typewriter keys. *Why go I so heavily when the enemy oppresseth me. . . .*

He could find no answer other than a tired awareness of the world's misery and unrighteousness.

He sucked the tepid air into his lungs and looked at his letter again. The letter was to Monseñor Perez at Cienfuegos. Fray Alejandro had taken the liberty of giving it a better face with the typewriter and the Company's stationery. Under the embossed heading and the nonchalant *New York-New Orleans-Habana* his poor plea became almost distinguished. It had cable addresses and code indications. Down the left side ran a proud column of seventeen centrales. Dosfuegos was lifted from insignificance, becoming, *Santa Clara Terminal Marine Transportation Department*.

Fray Alejandro could picture Monseñor Perez, his narrow lips parted, staring short-sightedly at the heading with considerably more attention than he would give to the letter itself. Fray Alejandro wanted the Bishop to come very much. It would be good for his meager flock. A vested bishop

would affect them as profoundly as the Company's paper would impress Monseñor Perez.

Fray Alejandro, motionless as a stone in the hot night, reread mechanically the list of centrales. A passive feeling of protest overcame for an instant his habitual humility. *Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it.* He sighed and wiped his hands on the sides of his coarse robe.

At the end of the room they had given up any pretense of work. One of the accountants asked when, for the love of God, did the mail come. He had a little friend from whom he was expecting a letter. They told him the gas-car brought it down from Central Chicago. It ought to be in at any moment. What was his girl friend like? asked some one, anxious to prolong the conversation.

The accountant raised his brows in pained protest. He made a gesture with a silk handkerchief, fanning his face, overcome. "Ten thousand horrors, Mauricio!" he said in delicate disgust, looking at his companion, "my girl friend!" They both laughed. His companion explained tolerantly that the friend was not a girl.

Every one was listening to the accountant, gulping down these details of urban sophistication and

refinement. Every one would have listened to any one, for that matter. The oppression of the night made them want company. They sat apathetic, but desperately attentive, fearing a silence as sheep fear to be separated from the flock. After a moment Fray Alejandro finished his letter. He called a clerk and produced two centavoes for a stamp. The clerk, bringing it to him, said, "It's a bad night, Father."

"You won't make it better, my friend," observed Fray Alejandro, staring at him gently, "by sitting down there and talking about city nastiness with those Habana people. I would go home if I were you."

The clerk nodded, slightly abashed. He said he was going to stay only a few minutes. "I don't like to-night," he admitted disarmingly. "It feels as though the devil were coming," and grinned feebly.

"The devil is never away," answered Fray Alejandro, "but only wicked men are alarmed by that, Esteban."

Fray Alejandro knew his people. He was sorry that it took the devil or a bishop to impress them, but God had made men that way, after all. A cynicism which some one else might feel never occurred to Fray Alejandro, for he had never con-

ceived his mission to be reforming men. He did not think men could be reformed, only helped; and at the end, by God's grace, saved. Vidal Monaga had once told him bluntly that his religion was a system for fools and cowards. Fray Alejandro usually faced scoffers with an interested stare, but he respected Vidal for what he was, so he remarked: "That, señor, is why we call it the Catholic and Universal Church." It was humility only, expecting less of people than Vidal's pride did. To God, Fray Alejandro thought, the righteousness of just men probably remained a little lower than the angels, and who knew how much higher than the lapses of fools and the weakness of cowards?

Fray Alejandro arose to leave the office.

As he stood up, the light vanished.

There was a shocked instant's silence. Then the others rushed to a common rescue with facetious shouts and cat-calls. So sudden and complete, the annihilation of their little shield against the dead weight of the dark gave the men at the room's end a turn. Whirring slower, the fans came to a halt. Outside rose the confused shouts of the workers in the caverns of the wharf, their flood lights gone, their loading cranes paralyzed.

They were simple people and this sudden stilling of the strong mechanical heart of the sea terminal threw them into unreasonable terror. When even the magic of the great machines failed, what awful powers must not the night hold?

Fray Alejandro moving steadily toward the door, pushed it open and the whimpering of witless panic seemed as tangible as the thick air on his face. He closed the door behind him and stretching out his hands before his face, advanced, raising his full, loud voice in the *Miserere* "Audi nos, exaudi nos. . . ."

There was a sound of many men stirring in the dark, turning at the echo of his words, their spent breath easing with the comfort of familiar things—"Redeemer of the World, Have mercy on us—"

The lights came back then. They came with blinding literalness, catching Fray Alejandro with his hands thrust out stupidly. He blinked and dropped his arms. The blessed music of the big cranes revived, would have drowned him out. In shrill chorus the foremen caught up their whistles.

Fray Alejandro was not resentful. Neither was he self-conscious, blinking again and finding himself face to face with Dr. Palacios. The terminal's medical officer was staring at him from behind his gold-rimmed pince-nez with its black

silk cord. Careful white linen made his stiff, short figure precise. His dark face had its habitual expression of sharp annoyance. He made a little gesture with his hand and said viciously, "What can you do with people like that?"

Fray Alejandro moved his head, looking down on the doctor's indignant face. "What would one wish to do, señor?"

Dr. Palacios pulled tighter the corners of his mouth. "Hombre!" he said. "What, indeed?"

The hard, exact atheism animating the doctor's view of humanity burst in violent aversion. "They aren't human beings," he said, "they're animals. Filthy, ignorant animals!"

He and the priests were enemies in theory, but there was no room for personalities in Dr. Palacios' indignation at the world which ran so stubbornly athwart the sanity of his science. The circumstances of his own life, staff physician at a stinking sweltering south coast sea terminal, gave him a perverted sympathy for the agonizing unreason of men. He could neither have resented so furiously, nor hated so keenly without a bond to link his frustration with their folly. Fray Alejandro was purely negative. He and his God were to be expected in a world of disease self-invited and death self-hastened.

"Afraid of the dark!" said Dr. Palacios impatiently. "Do you know what that is? Pathological! Humidity? Atmospheric conditions? Yes, but what do they work on? Claustrophobia! Lock a savage in a room and he goes crazy with it! Fear, my friend. Healthy people with sane minds aren't afraid."

He checked himself. Of course, Fray Alejandro was not his friend and Dr. Palacios did not want him to be. The psychology of the priest's quelling a potential panic with his Latin jargon revolted him. Not enough to protest, any more than he protested against treating a toothache with chloroform and alcohol instead of getting at the matter with decent dentistry. He knew he was upset, for he had actually forgotten what he was here for. He recovered himself now with a sharp shrug.

"I was coming to see if I could find you," Dr. Palacios said. "One of these creatures wants you. She thinks she is dying, but she's not. At least not now. She had poisoned herself. By accident, I suppose. I fixed her up with a stomach pump. That's all I can do, and only that by main force. She ate rat poison as nearly as I can see. Won't explain it. Won't take anything you don't cram down her. Won't be moved. It's that crazy

Hervas woman. She ought to be committed.”

“Cuchita?” asked Fray Alejandro, astounded.
“Are you sure she wanted to see me?”

“Oh, yes,” said Dr. Palacios unpleasantly, “she cut a goat open and saw something in it. Marvelous! Guts and blood! I saw it too—all over the place. Every one knows what she’s up to and won’t come within miles of the woman. She was so sick when I got there she couldn’t crawl—handsful of goat’s guts! Then she howls out about death and destruction. Yells and yells that the devil has his feet in her stomach. Some call it arsenic. Then she shrieks for the priest. All done in, I gathered; wanted some better magic. I tried to call some one to send. If she doesn’t calm down she’ll die. Would any one come? No! She might put a spell on them!”

Dr. Palacios paused for breath. Since the priest said nothing, he continued, still more angry. “She saw God, let me tell you! God walking up and down on the beach. Something I missed. What do you think he was doing? He was whacking houses over the roof with a whip. ‘Oh,’ said I, trying to calm her down by agreeing with her, ‘why do you suppose that was?’ ‘To show the devil where to go!’ she howls. Goes off herself; flat, out, for ten minutes. Then she’s back again, yelling for you. Not much loss if it finishes her,

but my cursed job is keeping them alive, so I thought I'd speak to you. Don't go if you don't want to. I suppose she isn't one of your people."

"All people——"

"Are your people," nodded Dr. Palacios, his lip curling a little. "I'm sorry for you. Most of the people here really are the devil's people, make no mistake. Maybe you can snatch her from the burning. You know about those things, I suppose. You'd better take a guard down with you. Stuck herself with a knife just before I came. Wanted some blood. Just as likely as not to want yours. That is, if you're going."

"I'll go," nodded Fray Alejandro. "Thank you."

"Don't thank me," requested Dr. Palacios. "It's none of my affair."

• 3 •

FRAY ALEJANDRO, for all his assurance to Dr. Palacios, walked out into the night and stopped. Joy, he said to himself heavily, *shall be in Heaven*

over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons. . . .

He moved his hill of a body, tugging it from one foot to another. He walked in darkness, which resisted his advance, swelling about him. *Joy, he groaned, shall be in Heaven. . . .*

He cut across the railroad yards. Not afraid, any more than Dr. Palacios was afraid, his innocence buckled him about like armor. Only, within the sure defense, his heart was so heavy. A man stepping in a morass would feel that way; the clinging heaviness creeping up, dragging at him until the resolution to cross the unfirm ground faltered, failed utterly in unreasonable panic to be out of it, to be free-footed, walking cleanly on safe, familiar soil.

His foot caught and Fray Alejandro almost fell. He had stumbled on a tie. Looking down, he saw the rails flickering away; two exquisite thin lines of radiance etched on the polished surfaces. It was from a gas-car that had come in, he noticed, peering for the source of that glow. He walked faster and more carefully. He came under the arc light at the yard gates and the guard in the door of the gate house glanced at him and said good night.

Fray Alejandro said good night, too; nothing more. He rejected the temptation to ask this man to go with him. He did not want a guard, for he was not afraid. What he had wanted, he thought, waddling blindly on, was not the man's heavy revolver and long machete, but whatever idle words he might say, the comfort of those solid boots and loose spurs marching in the dark with him. He experienced a quick shameful sense of defeat, recognizing his desire. Joy, he panted, *shall be in Heaven. . . .*

He came to the end of the road. Now were not even any more house windows; only a path winding over the sand drifts between ghost-like clumps of grass. He knew where Cuchita's hovel was. There was no light in it. He wondered why Dr. Palacios had left her alone with no light. Then he thought, drawing near, that perhaps Dr. Palacios had left a light; that Cuchita, out of her head, had extinguished it and waited insanely with a knife. He bumped against the door step and pausing, he swallowed and said: "Peace be unto this house!"

His voice sounded small. He could hear the surf on the beach much louder. He forced breath into his lungs and cried again, "Peace be unto this house!"

His hand, faintly unsteady, felt along the door for the catch, loosened it. The door swung open. Fray Alejandro hesitated only the fraction of a second and stepped in. He turned deliberately, closing the door after him. Then, his hands folded together in the sleeves of his robe, he faced about.

It was obvious why he had seen no light. A lamp had been burning, and burned still, with sinister waves of smoke fanning up the blackened chimney, very dimly in the room behind. On a block of mortared brick which served as a cooking stove, were coals, persistently red. The evil smell of the charred wick filled the darkness up to the sagging hump of the tiled roof. Appalling dirt and disorder was plain enough. Plainer still was the carcass of the goat, revoltingly torn. Cuchita, he saw, was crumpled on an old mattress in the corner, half covered with piles of sacking. Her breathing made a hard sound.

Fray Alejandro turned down the lamp until the flames rounded, grew steadier. The smoked glass shrouded it too completely for the room to appear any brighter. He saw that it would go out in a moment, for there was almost no oil. Then he bent and took up the horrid remains of the goat, carrying them to the other corner and covering

them with a bit of sacking. His hands were bloody and he wiped them. On the dirty shelves of the cupboards along the wall he found a few candle ends. Cuchita's eyes were open when he turned.

"Peace be unto this house," he repeated.

She paid no attention to him. Her face usually brown almost to black, was ghastly where the dim light struck it. She dragged a hand from under the dirty sacking and scratched her lips.

Fray Alejandro could understand that. He took the water pitcher. Squatting down clumsily on his knees, he pulled her half up against his arm and, poising the jug, poured the thin stream into her mouth. Either she could not or she would not swallow, for she strangled. He lowered her again, perplexed. Then he found a cup and came back, filling it full, and raised her again. She struck the cup aside convulsively, so it spilled on his robe. "What, then, do you wish?" he asked.

Perhaps she wanted to speak. He could not be certain, crouching down and staring at the sunken face. "You have sent for me," he said. "Here I am."

The lamp was failing. He would have to light a candle in a moment, and struck by the simple analogy, he wondered if she too were dying.

Looking at her face, it seemed more than dying. It could have been a face for death himself. While he thought that, came a sound dramatic and direct enough for the wings of the pale horse coming down. Dry as palm leaves in the wind, the hot silence of the night had been broken in an expiring sigh.

Storm, Fray Alejandro knew, storm at last. He thought first of hastening for Dr. Palacios before the tempest broke; then he realized that he could not leave, for she might die alone, before the doctor's arrival. He lit a candle and this new light showed her more frightening still.

Joy shall be in Heaven. . . .

Fray Alejandro could see death, in all literalness, there with him. Death had dismounted and come in; death sat down opposite him on her other side. He and death looked at each other while Cuchita lay still.

Fray Alejandro took the water jug resolutely and tilted it over the cup. There was hardly any left, but it would be enough to wet the ends of his fingers. He pushed his bulky arm under her, and raised her up. The candle tilted and flared in his hand, for he could find no place to set it. He attempted awkwardly to spill a little wax on the hard earth and fasten it upright.

“Do you truly and earnestly repent the wrong doings of your life, and especially your willful unbelief, persisting in error to this extremity?”

She would not have sent for him, surely, if she did not. So Fray Alejandro answered quickly for her, “I do truly and earnestly repent.”

“Do you appeal now to the infinite mercy of God, through the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, desiring whole-heartedly to live and die in His faith and Holy Church? To this blessed end do you submit yourself for the great sacrament of Baptism, or regeneration by water and the spirit, purposing to live in righteousness, or, if it be His will, to die in grace?”

Fray Alejandro bent close over her ghastly face. He even shook her a little.

“Yes,” he said, “yes. . . .”

He shook her more violently.

“Yes. . . .”

She did not open her eyes. Her mouth remained motionless, ajar, and her breath seemed harsher, so he answered for her again: “I so appeal, and do desire. I submit myself, and so purpose, God helping me.”

He stretched out a hasty hand for the cup of water and it overturned. There was an instant before he realized what he had done. Too late,

then. The dry earth drank it in. He lowered her sharply and sprang to his feet, looking about. No water. He thought in fleeting succession of lawful substitutes—milk, ink, any innocent fluid. He could see none. He seized the cup. He hastened to the door, rushing out into the night.

A dry, powerful wind struck him, carrying with it particles of sand to sting his cheeks. He jerked his cowl up over his head and staggered into it, struggling over the long dunes, catching his sandals in the clumps of grass. The deep sound from the southwest came like a bass chord touched by mighty fingers, distinct through the hammer of surf goaded against the sand. It was a hurricane on the way, he recognized. As he thought this, the siren of the storm warning awoke over the roofs of the Marine office, far behind him; metal-throated blasts of alarm screaming up the wind.

He got over the edge, onto the firmer sand of the beach. Now he could make out the dim line of the breakers, and he panted toward them until a long film of water whipped over his sandals and broke foaming about his ankles. He dipped inaccurately and filled his cup. He turned, pressing his fat hand over the top to keep in the water, and ran clumsily with the wind helping him. Once he stumbled and fell, laid his knee open on the

coral fragments, but he spilt only a little water.

The first huge drops of rain were slanting level, hard as pebbles, when he reached the door. He was just in time, he knew, for no human being could make headway against that wind in another moment. He got the door closed and leaned against it, his heart jumping under his breast in sickening bounds, his face crimson, his knees scarcely firm enough to hold him erect. The frame of the house shifted and creaked like a ship at sea. There was a crash that cracked open the universe; the night went white as day outside and the rain came down as a river comes over a cliff. The single candle flame bent horizontal, flamed a valiant instant in the wind whipping through every crevice. It vanished. The coals fanned redder and Fray Alejandro could see.

Cuchita sat stiffly erect, her eyes wide. She made a sound in her throat which rose to a sharp scream.

"I am here," gasped Fray Alejandro, "I am here, my daughter."

He grasped his cup tighter. He forced his aching knees into motion.

She looked at him with eyes so awful that he faltered. Then he thrust his hand into the cup with its salt water and sediment of sand. She

shrank away from him, but he bent and held her firm.

“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,” he managed.

Something burnt his wrist. He saw the blade of a knife. It fell from her hand as he looked and he felt the blood, warm and sticky, running on his arm under the sagging sleeve.

He pushed her down a little and she went limp, her fingers closing and opening mechanically on the cloth of his robe.

“Be of good cheer,” said Fray Alejandro steadily, “thy faith hath made thee whole. . . .”

• 4 •

FRAY ALEJANDRO managed to light another candle. Sitting with his back to the wall where the wind forced through, he sheltered the flame between his hands, maintaining a little glow against the raging dark and the fearful white moments of lightning. The roof leaked, spattering hard on the trampled floor; cool spray of

driven rain burst occasionally through the corners. The house might not stand, but its very poorness, crouched, half dug into the earth backed by the drifting dunes, helped it. Fray Alejandro prayed alternately for his new convert and for fishermen who might have been surprised at sea. Candle flame, fighting the wind even in the hollow of his hands, scorched the palms sometimes, making him grunt and start. The blood dried on his fat arm; the long shallow lacerations had stopped bleeding, throbbing a little.

As the night wore on and the storm eased to lighter rain, Cuchita seemed to sink lower. The peace of her resting grew more ominous. Fray Alejandro was troubled. At last, when he knew it must be toward dawn, he fixed the small end of the last candle on the table, drew his cowl over his head and went to seek Dr. Palacios.

It was raining, steady and cool. Dosfuegos was dark except for the lights in the railroad yard. Fray Alejandro's robe, quickly soaked, hung heavily on him, but the wash of the rain soothed his tired body. He plodded through the shallow water, gleaming on the wide sandy street. He crossed to the iron foot bridge raised above the tracks at the entrance to the railroad yards.

There were men moving in the dim white

buildings of the power station. Tall rounded windows were pale with light behind them. A quiet pervasive throbbing came from the big electric pumps ceaselessly sucking off the water which might have flooded the machinery. At the round-house a locomotive, its crew loitering in the vast doors out of the rain, was getting up steam with a faint pant and hiss. A guard in oilskins, polished and flashing in the wet, walked before the pier doors, the magazine and lock of his rifle wrapped about with a strip of oilcloth.

Fray Alejandro pushed the soggy cowl off his head and the rain fell fast on his bald pate, trickling down his cheeks. He felt a deep tired peace. The storm past. Cuchita safe; so safe that if she breathed her last even while he walked here it could not mar her deep security. These quiet men about their business in the cool end of the night filled him with a waking repose.

He went down the stairs on the other side. His sandals creaked soddenly up the concrete walk to Dr. Palacios' house where the red light burned in the darkness of the door. He stood there out of the rain and pressed the electric button.

Dr. Palacios came clad in a night shirt, his hair disheveled and his eyes sleepy. He looked angry, but he put out a quick hand and pushed back the dripping sleeve on Fray Alejandro's arm.

"Just so," he said briefly. "Go into the dispensary."

"That is of no moment," answered Fray Alejandro. "I am afraid Cuchita is dying."

"Go into the dispensary," repeated Dr. Palacios. "You'll find a little tetanus is a quick way to Heaven, if that's 'of moment.' We'll just cauterize it and give you a shot. My friend, never try to tell me my business when you get me out of bed at four o'clock in the morning."

The night shirt switched about Dr. Palacios' thin shanks as he led Fray Alejandro through the door beyond. Fray Alejandro sat down obediently amid the gleam of white and the glitter of glass and polished steel.

"I'll take care of your Cuchita in good time," said Dr. Palacios fretfully, pulling open an instrument case. "I can't go up there until I get some clothes on, can I? Well, contain yourself."

He flipped on an electric sterilizing bath, dropped an instrument or two in it. "You're dripping all over the floor," he pointed out. "If you do this often, you'll die of fever, supposing you don't die of lockjaw first. Take that thing off and give it to me. I'll have it wrung out in the kitchen and dried a little. Haven't you a water-proof?"

"No," admitted Fray Alejandro, standing up. He pulled off the robe painfully. The old trousers he wore, with the legs rolled up to the knee, seemed fairly dry. He had no shirt. His heavy rounded shoulders were shining with water. He looked so strange, standing there with the worn trousers and sandals, that Dr. Palacios laughed shortly, took up the wet robe, holding it as far from himself as possible, and said, "I'll send you in some coffee. You ought to have brandy, but it would make you sick when I give you the tetanus shot. I'll get you a riding slicker you can wear up. It will be just as good as the robe. Here, take this towel and dry yourself off."

Ten minutes later Dr. Palacios returned to find Fray Alejandro sitting meekly with the coffee cup in one hand and the towel in the other. He took them both away and said, "We'll look at that arm."

Fray Alejandro watched him.

"Yes," agreed Dr. Palacios. "Not very pleasant. But it's a fiesta compared to an infection, and don't forget it. All right, we'll just jab this in, and that will be all." He frowned, balanced his needle, and took up a little roll of Fray Alejandro's skin. "Just sit still, please!" he snapped. "It's not going to kill you."

"I'm sorry," said Fray Alejandro. "No, it didn't hurt."

Dr. Palacios got the arm bandaged.

The long riding slicker was tight, but Fray Alejandro managed to button it. He looked more than ever like a mountain, a dirty yellow mountain; his thick sunburnt neck projecting, balancing his unshaved jowls and tired eyes above it. "I hope we will not be too late," he said.

"It takes longer to die than you think," answered Dr. Palacios, getting into his own waterproof and taking up his bag. "You'll find her still kicking probably. A woman like that is hard to kill or she'd have been dead long ago."

He seemed faintly embarrassed. His tone was elaborately callous, as though warning Fray Alejandro to suspect him of neither charity nor compassion. They went out into the rain and darkness together.

"Well, could you do anything?" asked Dr. Palacios.

"I baptized her," responded Fray Alejandro, puffing to keep pace with the doctor's small quick steps.

Dr. Palacios answered nothing for a moment and then he said, "Probably does people like that

as much good as anything I could do. Like the devil, they want to be saints when they're sick. Never occur to them to be sanitary when they're well."

"All our people are very ignorant," answered Fray Alejandro, panting.

"Keep your meekness to inherit the earth with," whipped out Dr. Palacios.

Fray Alejandro, plodding fast through the puddles, inclined his head in apology. Dr. Palacios seemed to relent. He said, "Well, you consider your visit worth while then. How did you get hurt?"

"The unclean spirit coming out of her attacked me," explained Fray Alejandro.

Dr. Palacios gave a little grunt.

"Afterwards she rested quietly," continued Fray Alejandro, unabashed but very short of breath. "An hour ago she seemed to be failing, and I was ignorant of what to do." He paused quickly, not wishing to annoy the doctor again. "I mean," he said, "that it seemed better to come for you."

Dr. Palacios grunted once more and was silent.

Now, quite suddenly, it was getting light; a pallid light, faint and obscure behind the sullen

sky and the rain. Coming onto the path, you could see the difference between the grass clumps and the wet sand dunes. You could even see the small dark mass of Cuchita's hovel.

Dr. Palacios put out a gloved hand, struck on the door and pushed it open. The candle Fray Alejandro had left was burning very low. Dr. Palacios stood pulling off his gloves and laying aside his waterproof. Fray Alejandro waited, breathing hard in the long shadow, while the doctor snapped open his bag and took out an electric torch. The white shaft of it poured suddenly over Cuchita, twisted up in the sacking. Dr. Palacios looked only a second. Then he crouched down and took her shoulder.

"Can you do anything?" asked Fray Alejandro anxiously.

Dr. Palacios' dark face turned back into the failing candle light. "She's dead," he answered.

Fray Alejandro bent his exhausted knees and sank down on them. The long yellow slicker almost tripped him, but he managed to recover his balance, and crossed himself. He closed his eyes, puffy from lack of sleep, to pray, just moving his lips.

When he opened them the doctor was bent over the table filling out a form rapidly. He paused,

annoyed, once or twice, shaking the ink down into his fountain pen. The electric torch lay beside him, slanting radiance along the table.

"You want to have a funeral?" he said over his shoulder to Fray Alejandro.

Fray Alejandro roused himself and answered, "Yes."

"At least, Mr. Stellow will be down to-day, I have heard," he explained. "I think he will perhaps have the Company pay for burial in town. If not, I will simply read the service. She had no money, and no family. I am sorry that she died alone."

Dr. Palacios wrote.

"My friend, any sort of dying is a lonely business. Do you want the body taken over to your chapel place?"

"Yes," decided Fray Alejandro, struggling to his feet. "I will find some woman to come and arrange it, before you send the men." He paused wearily. "Nida Monaga saw a great deal of her," he said at last. "If there is nothing I can do, I will go and see if she is willing."

"There is nothing you can do," said Dr. Palacios, putting up the fountain pen.

He gazed a moment at Fray Alejandro, standing in his absurd yellow slicker. "Come back to

my house and have breakfast when you finish," he suggested. "Your clothes will be dry."

He put his other things away and went and straightened the sacking, drawing it over Cuchita's face. He turned and looked again at Fray Alejandro. "I should think you would be pleased," he observed, "since she went to Heaven, didn't she?"

"I am only sorry that I was not here," said Fray Alejandro.

"If necessary I will contribute something toward a funeral," stated Dr. Palacios. "I will see you when you come down to breakfast."

He drew his waterproof about him, nodded shortly, and went out.

• 5 •

THE rain fell more and more softly. Quiet and thin as the growing twilight of the dawn, it was wet once more on Fray Alejandro's face. The tightly buttoned slicker was hot and he undid the top to cool his breast. He felt less tired than a

half an hour ago. It was a sensation that his struggling asceticism made familiar. Driven to the bounds of his endurance, his unwieldy body, just short of the breaking point, found some sudden and secret strength. Dr. Palacios would have explained to him that it was no more than the phenomenon of the runner's second wind, but Fray Alejandro considered it the grace of God.

Coming down the path, Fray Alejandro looked now seaward and it was light there too, though the rain made a thin mist. Out of it, like a hand pushed through a veil, a ship was coming. Its triangular blue sail, black with moisture, tilted across the faint wind. Its progress was an entranced, hardly perceptible glide. The haze of the rain, the sail so sinisterly black, the stealth of its movement, suggested the home-coming of a ghost ship, lost last night in the hurricane. Fray Alejandro halted and stared.

He saw at last that the boat was real enough. It was Vidal Monaga's *Saeta*. Osmundo and he, by some miracle of foresight and seamanship, must have managed to put in to the keys by the lighthouse and ride out the storm. Fray Alejandro was glad. He hoped no one less capable had been at sea. Then he reflected that it would be perhaps easier to get Nida to promise to come to Cuchita

if he talked to her before the *Saeta* got to the wharf. Vidal was not beyond ordering him out of the house. He had at least ten minutes, he judged, and he began walking again, more rapidly.

The door of the Monaga house stood open in the gray light. Probably, unlocked, it had been blown open during the night, for there were puddles on the floor. Perhaps no one was there now, but Fray Alejandro knocked; waited, and knocked again.

It must be half past five, Fray Alejandro thought. In that event, Nida might easily be out in the kitchen, unable to hear, so finally he went in, moving in the obscurity, and pushed aside the curtain at the end of the passage.

He stopped then, for a door was open and electric light fell out onto the floor. On the edge of a disordered bed some one sat, bent down, slipping on a shoe. Fray Alejandro's sandals, creaking, made him look up. The lean-pointed features brown under the stubble of beard, did not belong in Dosfuegos. The obvious explanation, that this person came off the sugar boat, was for reasons beyond Fray Alejandro's shocked analysis, to be rejected instantly. The curious face, the eyes,

lacked a quality noticeable only in its absence, of docility or steadiness; of the responsibility, however small, however forced, bred from employment by others. The social side of Fray Alejandro, priest in the ranked order of hierarchial authority outstanding against the chaos of such individuals, saw no good in the man. The moral or spiritual side, by indications even slighter and intuition even less definable, felt in him nothing but evil.

Fray Alejandro said without premeditation, "I am sorry to see you here."

The face of the figure sitting on the bed had undergone a series of slight changes. Fray Alejandro was unconscious of his rain wet head, the long slicker open on his damp flabby chest, but this man took them into consideration and apparently concluded that he was an idiot.

"Well, then, go home, old goat," he suggested, "for I'm leaving in a minute and then you can return."

"You did very wrong to come here," said Fray Alejandro. He felt dazed; a shock not simply surprise, but unexpected helplessness. This person made him conscious of a certain inhumanity. If the affected surface was a sneer, none the less,

under it like a core of rock was the actuality of revolt against the whole human world, a spirit like a moving stone to break down the barriers of belief and hope which staved off from men the consciousness of that great immortal, futility.

Fray Alejandro simply looked. Then his feet bore him on. The door at the end of the passage was flung open, and still numbed by the impression that stranger had made on him, Fray Alejandro stopped and blinked before he realized it was Nida. She had a dirty wrapper tied about her. Looking at the priest, her eyes went darker. "What do you want?" she demanded, bringing her hands to her hips. "I suppose you have been poking around to see who was here."

"I came on another matter, my daughter," began Fray Alejandro. The authority which had melted from him, facing the man, came back in the intolerant dignity of Holy Church. Majesty of the See of Peter, might of centuries, started up unconsciously in the changed intonation of one poor priest, ridiculous in the yellow slicker, grotesque in his fat and ugly weariness. It silenced Nida. They stood gazing at each other.

Only for a moment. In Nida were things stronger and more vital than vested authority and sacred tradition. They rose up in her, tide on tide.

In Fray Alejandro the humility of a good man weakened that momentary mastery.

"Who are you to tell me what I should do?" demanded Nida, though he had said nothing more. Having found her voice, she recovered, too, her anger. "You will mind your affairs, and stumble less into mine! What concern is it of yours if this gentleman is here?"

"My concern is not for your wickedness, which I pray you may repent—"

"Then get on, in God's name, and talk no more."

"Cuchita," persisted the priest, "who was your friend, is dead. I thought you would come and arrange the body for burial."

Nida faltered. The full force of consternation which at any other time might have overwhelmed her, met now her anger, head-on. Her face colored more; the balance swayed. Then she said, "May that witch rot! Seek help elsewhere, old man!"

"You will do nothing, then?"

"A million nothings!" shrilled Nida, definitely triumphant. "Take yourself off!"

Fray Alejandro bent his head a little and faced about. He walked down the passage, catching a glimpse of the lean-faced person lighting a ciga-

rette in the room where the electric bulb burned.

In the wide street it was almost morning and he stood a moment.

Something troubled him then. He stepped back, pushing open the door he had just closed.

"For how many times you!" cried Nida. She had come from the back and stood by the end of the passage.

Fray Alejandro held the door knob. "I wanted to tell you that your father's boat is coming in."

He closed the door and moved away in the rain.

• 6 •

NIDA said, "He is an old liar, and fat, too."

Oliver Findley slid his other foot into its laceless shoe. "Yet you had better go and look," he suggested, "for I think he has frightened you a good deal."

"He does not frighten me," retorted Nida. She put her hands on her hips and looked at Oliver Findley. "I am tired of you," she said.

"Yes, señorita?" said Oliver Findley. "Well,

do bring me some coffee, and look out the back window, too."

"Listen!" cried Nida, thrusting her jaw forward. "Do you think I'm so simple as to believe anything that fat old man of a priest says? I do not even know that Cuchita is dead."

"For the sweet sake of God's Mother," urged Oliver Findley, "bring coffee, little one. What is your Cuchita to me?"

"Don't say that, señor," said Nida sharply. "Have a care for your luck."

"I don't get my luck from old women," responded Oliver Findley. With a certain pure skill of inflection he made it exquisitely obscene.

"If you do not stop insulting me—"

"I will get no coffee," guessed Oliver Findley. "Well, I don't believe I'll get any, any way, at this rate." He got to his feet and moved past Nida toward the door.

For one instant Nida was glad to see him go. She even opened her mouth to frame a suitable insult of her own. Then a quick inner protest, a sense of the defeat it would mean, halted both her words and her anger. She was conscious of being about to lose a chance, hardly formulated, but important in her scheme of personal advancement. She clutched his arm.

"No, señor," she said, "I will bring you coffee."

"Pray do not trouble," begged Oliver Findley, tilting his eyes in ironic humility. "I am not worthy," he pointed out, "of your gracious attentions, señorita."

"Yes!" insisted Nida.

"No, no," repeated Oliver Findley. "A thousand pardons, señorita."

Out of the shadows of the passage behind a voice broke on them both, even and level. "May I know the meaning of this, señor?"

Nida spun about. Oliver Findley raised his eyes. The figure with the poncho tossed cloak-like over the shoulder had still the black hood on his head. A hand with heavy gold rings glinting rose and pushed this back, shaking the thick white hair. Mist had beaded on the full beard. The dark eyes looked out, limpid, under the heavy eyebrows. "Señor?" the voice inquired, and, impersonally, "señorita?"

Oliver Findley could not see Nida's face, but her voice was so assured that he had a quick start of admiration for her.

"This poor man came asking for coffee—"

"Did I, then, hear you refuse it to him?"

"Yes, but—"

"You bring shame on my house," continued the

deep voice quietly. "One in need asks, and you refuse. What sort of thing is that to be doing?"

Nida raised her voice. "Yes," she shrilled, "yes! And how am I to ask a strange man into the house when I am alone here at this hour? Already every one who saw him enter will tell lies about me." Nida paused, dramatic, quickly controlling that quiver of excitement at her own cleverness. "Now," she cried, wheeling about, "that my father has returned, enter in God's name, señor, and what we have is yours."

"No, no," protested Oliver Findley politely, "I did wrong to ask, señor, señorita." He bent sharp from the waist, bowing to hide his face.

Vidal Monaga said, "You will not go away from here empty, stranger."

"You do not know who I am," answered Oliver Findley. He would have explained more fully, curious to know what the old man would do if he knew Oliver Findley was an enemy of the Company—or victim, rather, Oliver Findley amended it; one might be an enemy in the sense that one was against a thing, but against man in general, against the United Sugar Company, against God, perhaps, one was a signalized victim, not an opponent worth any consideration. "That is," he said, "I—"

"I know that you are hungry, my friend."

Vidal took off the poncho. "Enter," he said. "It is warmer in the kitchen." To Nida he threw a glance. "Make haste," he told her. "We are hungry."

In the kitchen the stove was hot, with coffee and boiled milk steaming on it.

"Eggs; meat—" said Vidal, gesturing.

"God's Providence brought you in from the sea, señor?" asked Oliver Findley.

Vidal Monaga answered, "For me there is no God's Providence. I have sailed boats for many years. And my son, too. Hence we come ashore safe."

"May it always be so," nodded Oliver Findley. The old man amused him. Now Vidal was saying, "I thank you for that wish, señor."

Vidal was something of an opponent himself, Oliver Findley judged, from such equitable give and take, constantly balancing the book of his personal obligations. Things to be said, things to be done, answering to some secret requirements of his own. He would feed the hungry, deny God's Providence, ignore, if need was, the United Sugar Company, for those were the things he found it suitable to be doing. In the end, he would owe neither God nor man anything, free to settle with

integral self-respect his own large debt to himself. Oliver Findley smiled, recognizing the perfection of this noble selfishness.

Nida set food in front of them.

Outside the door banged. Osmundo, straight and tall, bare to the waist, with his damp jacket and shirt hanging on his arm, ran a hand through his hair and looked about the kitchen, silhouetted against the morning, broadening behind him.

"We have a guest, my son," said Vidal, turning his big head. "Come and eat."

One more of the same, thought Oliver Findley, sensing some double kinship in the words, the impersonality which had faced the girl vanishing in an intimacy of respect perhaps deeper than the bond of blood. Nida, he saw, would be the alien in the house as much as himself.

Osmundo bent his head a little and stepped over the threshold. The light fell on him then, a shadow of expression touched the dark, intolerant face. Oliver Findley's fabric of ideas collapsed abruptly and in the second's silence, he thought: The old man has a lot to learn. The expected flaw in Vidal's integrity would be the blindness of his paternal regard. Oliver Findley might have laughed, welcoming once again the folly of aspiration but the expression on Osmundo's face changed

more. At the instant Findley was on his feet, masking the move with a bow. He took in the other door with the corner of his eye, standing all alertness. Children of this world, he thought, still just a little wiser. . . .

Osmundo flicked his eyes from Oliver Findley to Nida at the stove. He laid his wet things carefully on the back of a chair. Nida felt it too, Oliver Findley noticed. She turned at the stove with a heavy spoon in her hand, holding it tighter. She moved cleverly, laying it down on the table and closed her fingers about the handle of a long knife. Vidal had been swallowing coffee. He set the cup down, aware of something wrong now, and turned his head to look at his son.

Osmundo's face contracted, going red under the heavy brown. A vein stood out in his forehead, clear and distinctly throbbing. Muscles twitched and moved a little in his powerful torso.

"So?" he said. His voice, when it came, was thick, suffocated by the cords knotting in his strong neck.

"Osmundo!" said Vidal. He rose to his feet, amazed.

Osmundo pointed a hand at his father. "Stay clear!" came the husky voice. "Stay clear. I have a thing to settle."

"Be seated, or I will know why!" said Vidal.

"Be seated yourself, old man," cried Osmundo. "Take away your foolishness, or I'll finish you too!"

"Before a guest," said Vidal's deep voice, "you dishonor my house with brawling. This instant, sit down and be silent!"

"Honor? Your house?" roared Osmundo. "Old, brainless pig, your house—"

"My honorable house," said Vidal.

He stepped in front of his son as Osmundo started toward Nida. Vidal's great ring-laden hand swept and struck him down with one conclusive blow. "My house," he repeated, standing quiet, "much as you may shame it, my son."

Osmundo pressed his skull a moment, where it hit against the floor. He brought a hand down and wiped the blood from his mouth. The muscles knotted harder under the brown skin of his shoulders. He jerked his head again, shaking away the daze of his falling. He yelled, "with your whore of a daughter—"

"Before my guest—" Vidal's words fell out of his beard like stones, quiet and solid.

"Who'll sleep with anything," shouted Osmundo. "Even with that,"—he tossed a hand

toward Oliver Findley,—“which I will deal with later!”

“You are insane,” said Vidal. “I will not notice you.”

“I beg you to forgive the craziness of my son,” he said, turning to Oliver Findley, “who does not know what he says.”

Oliver Findley inclined his head mechanically. He was several steps nearer the door.

“I do not know?” echoed Osmundo, coming to his feet. “I do not know?” His whole face melted brick-red, hard lines and wrinkles like stone standing out in fury. “She’s got a different fish on her line this time. This time she’ll die for it.”

Vidal put a hand in his beard. “What are you saying, my son?” he asked. “What do I understand you to mean?”

“Guess what I mean, beard-tugger! Guess if she’ll play fast and loose with me.”

Nida screamed, backing against the table.

Vidal looked at his son.

“And may you choke on it, old man!”

Vidal intercepted the rush again. He was like a bronze giant breaking from the monumental calm into disastrous action. His big fist might

have been mailed. It hit like a hammer, cracking on Osmundo's chin.

Osmundo went half sideways, half backwards on the floor. He did not try to get up this time. Nida cut a second scream in half with her fingers whipped against her mouth.

Vidal dropped his hand, shaking it a little, for it was numb from the impact.

"Please to continue your breakfast, señor," he said, turning slowly on Oliver Findley. "I have business now."

He bent and picked up Osmundo.

"I give you good day, señor," he said.

He pushed the door open with his foot and went out into the fresh morning with his son heavy in his arms.

.7.

FRAY ALEJANDRO had breakfasted, though not with Dr. Palacios. The doctor had been sent for to look at a man who slipped and fell on the sugar boat. He was long in returning.

Fray Alejandro's robe had not altogether dried, but the rain was past entirely. The gray sky, which had looked first like a metal lid, now lifted like one, tilting slowly up from the southern horizon, showing a pure morning under its rim. The leagues of water grew less gray with this reflected blue. It would be clear and blazing in an hour or so. Already it was much warmer.

Fray Alejandro had seen to the moving of Cuchita's body, but he had missed saying his Mass for the first morning in a long time, because when the arrangements were complete, he felt ill and faint. Breakfast helped him, but now, an hour later, he seemed unequal to the duties of the day. He looked in the purse attached to the top of his trousers and went to the café to have a cognac.

The café was dark. Fray Alejandro found a seat at one of the small dirty tables and waited, not feeling well. After a moment Cipriano came out of the cantina hall.

Cipriano had been up for hours, first watching the serving of food to the night shift, coming off, the guards and men from the power plant and the train sheds; and then, of breakfast to those who were coming on. No one less formidable than himself could be trusted to see they did not, by their greediness, make inroads too painful on his

profits. With him, arguing loudly, Cipriano drove now a young negro carrying a pail and mop. These things were set down and the negro went sullenly about standing the chairs on the tables, preparing to attack the stained and muddy cement of the floor. Cipriano waddled up and Fray Alejandro asked for cognac and a siphon.

"No ice?" inquired Cipriano.

The Company, installing electric refrigeration, enabled him to supply his bar with quantities of neat ice cubes. These marvelous trays of frozen squares attracted so much admiration that Cipriano had long ago begun to charge for them, though they cost him nothing.

"No ice," said Fray Alejandro, partly because he refused instinctively any luxury, and partly because he felt sad to think that people paid money for ice that melted when so much poverty remained.

Cipriano, resigned, went to fetch the cognac. The black boy slopped water on the floor and pushed his mop back and forth lethargically. A switch engine, collecting empty cars in the yards, whistled several times. People passed on the street. A big buff-colored motor truck lettered *U.S.C. Marine Terminal, Dosfuegos, S.C.*, blocked Fray Alejandro's line of vision, pausing to collect

Cipriano's garbage cans. Even the cans, now they came in sight, being heaved up to the men on top, were lettered *U.S.C.*

Fray Alejandro reflected, numb with discomfort, that a company owning so much would hardly refuse to send Cuchita up to Sancti Spíritus and buy one of the small spaces in the cemetery wall for her. Not unnaturally he felt no better, for he had forgotten what Dr. Palacios said about alcohol and tetanus injections.

He squirted more soda in the glass and breathed heavily.

Against the pale side of the big garbage truck appeared a figure entering. The light behind and the darkness within prevented Fray Alejandro from recognizing it as it stood glancing about at the stacked chairs on the tables pushed aside. It advanced then, and Fray Alejandro, blinking in distress, nodded good morning before he saw that it was the man who had been in Nida's room.

Fray Alejandro might have arisen and left had he been less sick. Not that he felt any of the pride of righteousness which would make him regard this plainly evil person as a contamination, but simply that he was aware that his presence could serve no good purpose. The man sat down and Fray Alejandro did not look at him.

There was a silence while Fray Alejandro took a convulsive swallow of the brandy and soda.

The voice beside him ordered aguardiente and when Cipriano had gone for it, addressed him: "You've changed your frock, Father."

Perhaps because the tone was milder and less assured than formerly, perhaps only because any voice pulled annoyingly at Fray Alejandro's attention in his present illness, he turned his head a little.

"You do not have to look at me that way," the voice complained. "I shall not be here long enough to trouble you."

"I am not looking at you," pronounced Fray Alejandro out of the unpleasant singing in his head, "nor am I interested in what you have to say, señor. I do not know where you are or—" He halted and corrected himself, "I meant to say, who are you, or where you come from."

His companion's eyes slanted more, and Fray Alejandro, for all his claim, did look at him now; long enough to see that the man had decided Fray Alejandro was drunk and felt amused. His whole face softened and became pleasant to look at.

Fray Alejandro, who had wished to end the conversation, decided now that he must explain.

"I seem to be unwell," he said. "It was neces-

sary for me to be up all night and perhaps something I ate for breakfast disagreed with me."

He closed his eyes and pressed his hand to his forehead. Then aware of Cipriano coming back, he opened his eyes again and held his head up. Cipriano refused suspiciously to leave the bottle. Conversation ensued. The man produced bills and Cipriano went away. His companion filled a glass and raised it to Fray Alejandro. "Have no concern, Father," he said more familiarly, "'su salud!"

The glass was back on the table with nothing in it.

Fray Alejandro blinked, not seeing well, and the man said, "I'm an American."

Fray Alejandro made a protesting motion with his hand. Only by fixing his eyes in a hard stare could he keep his head steady. The voice said again, "I'm sorry you were angry about this morning."

Fray Alejandro could hardly remember what morning he referred to, or why. "Very wrong of you, señor," he stated at last, putting his thumbs on the surface of the table and squeezing his fingers against the bottom.

"Yes," nodded Oliver Findley civilly, "I am sure you are right. It was about that I wanted to

speak. Unfortunately other people came in this morning. The others were bad.”

“Bad?” said Fray Alejandro, swallowing several times.

Oliver Findley filled his glass and leaned back in the chair. “Well,” he shrugged, “I do not mean that you were very cordial—”

“You are talking too much—” said Fray Alejandro with difficulty.

“No one knows about this, except me,” observed Oliver Findley. “I have not spoken to any one, Father.”

“I mean, too many words,” said Fray Alejandro dizzily. “Señor, I am very unwell.”

“I am sorry for that,” answered Oliver Findley. “It seemed to me that a number of people were going to be unwell, though no one bothered about me much. You see, the old man and his son came in. The young fellow was bad. He might have killed her if it hadn’t been for the old man. He knocked him down a few times. Do you understand me?”

“Yes,” nodded Fray Alejandro, “I understand you. I am going to be sick, I think,” he added, and promptly was.

Oliver Findley watched him disinterestedly.

He took another drink. "Are you better now?" he asked.

Fray Alejandro was better. His head was much clearer. He said he was sorry to the black boy, who grunted in return and came with the mop and pail. "I remember now that the doctor gave me something this morning," gasped Fray Alejandro.

"Just so," agreed Oliver Findley. "Well, when you feel like it, perhaps you'd better go and see the girl. The others have gone. I think the old man put his son back on the boat and sailed him out so he couldn't kill his sister."

"You have made a great deal of trouble," said Fray Alejandro, getting to his feet. "But I am obliged to you for telling me."

"That is all right," nodded Oliver Findley. "It's all in my day's work, señor."

MR. STELLOW, climbing down from the engine cab of number 9 was astonished to find the long concrete platform of the freight office deserted. Usually he was met at Dosfuegos by a number of people; some officially reporting, some idle, some intent on small businesses, anxious to place a claim on his attention before he retired behind the barrier of clerks and guards. There was not even a boy to take his bag.

Mr. Stellow nodded to the engine driver and took his own bag. He had never found it necessary to establish his authority by any insistence on the retinue so dear to the south. He moved slowly in the morning sunlight, looking about him. An acute appreciation of atmospheres and situations warned him that everything was not all right. An accentuated difference, not so much in his reception as in the startling emptiness of the railroad yards, made him speculative. It did not disturb him, for he had never encountered a situation either to take him by surprise or find him unpre-

pared. He continued to walk, lugging the bag in his large hand.

Then he saw what explained everything, except the reason for it. The double iron gates of the railroad yards were closed. Instead of one guard drowsing in the little gate house, there were a dozen. They patrolled, in good order, the whole length of the fence facing the town. Stiff, with their rifles on their shoulders, they walked their beats gravely. Beyond the fence were straggling groups of people, staring. Mr. Stellow appraised them. Just curiosity on their part. Plainly whatever had happened they knew nothing of it.

Looking, still, he saw one form break from the loitering group at the corner and advance limping to the fence. That lame man, Mederos. Mederos clutched the pickets and spoke to the guard. The guard's voice came to Mr. Stellow—

“Stand back, please.” The guard passed on.

Turning, Mr. Stellow saw the number on his badge—14. Mr. Stellow noted it as material for a corporal as soon as a vacancy should occur. Many men would have stopped and talked, or else been needlessly abusive.

Mr. Stellow advanced under the shade of the freight office roof. In the telegraph room a clerk with ear pieces over his head sat nervously before

his keys. Mr. Stellow entered the general offices. Here the Chief Clerk stood against the edge of a desk. He started forward as Mr. Stellow pushed the screen door open, made to say something, swallowed and took the bag out of Mr. Stellow's hand.

"Good morning, señor," he said doubtfully.

"What does all this mean?" asked Mr. Stellow.

"I don't know, señor," answered the Chief Clerk.

"Who shut the gates?"

"Rijo, señor. He ordered out the guards, too. He told me I was not to leave the building until you came. Therefore I could not come to get your bag." He swallowed again. "I think something has happened."

The strain of not knowing what, while he stood there in the empty office all alone, had done more to unnerve him than any outright danger or disaster. The comfort of Mr. Stellow's presence acted on him now. He lost that first witless aspect.

"So far as I know," he stated, "everything has been entirely peaceful and orderly. About twenty minutes ago the Alcalde gave his orders, in the name of the Republic, I noticed, señor, not the Company." The Chief Clerk had wholly regained

his usual unobtrusive intelligence. "There have been rumors of a crazy plot against the government at Trinidad," he offered, "so I thought that perhaps some insurrectionists had come in and Rijo was taking steps. No one is allowed to approach the pier. I heard that. Well, I'm glad you're here, señor."

"Where's Rijo?"

"I don't know, señor. He went out again. I haven't seen him since."

"I'll trouble you to bring my bag to the Casa."

Mr. Stellow went into the private office, pulled out a drawer and took a small automatic from it, shoving the weapon into his back pocket.

They came down the steps together, approaching the gate. The two guards there grounded their rifles and stood.

"Open up, please," said Mr. Stellow.

One man leaned his rifle against the gate house wall and pulled one half of the big gate open.

"Just hang a chain across and stand on here," requested the Administrator. "No admissions. Where is the señor Alcalde?"

"I don't know, señor."

"You're the corporal? Tell the sergeant that any further orders will come from me."

"Yes, señor."

Mr. Stellow went out onto the sandy street, the Chief Clerk keeping close to him with the bag. People who had been scattered along the fence moved down quickly, gathering in a small crowd, peering over each other's shoulders. Mr. Stellow turned that way and inclined his head. A quick chorus of good mornings greeted him. Out of the group pushed the cripple, Mederos. He came skipping frantically over the drying sand. The corporal of the guards stepped under the chain behind intercepting Quintín with a couched rifle. "Stand back, señor!"

Mr. Stellow halted, turning. "All right," he nodded. "What is it, Mederos?"

The corporal swung the mouth of his rifle aside, moving up behind Quintín as he approached. Quintín's legs collapsed irregularly and he snatched at Mr. Stellow's knees. The corporal dropped the heavy butt of the gun accurately on the wrists shooting out, knocking down Quintín's hands. Quintín lost his balance and toppled over with a shrill noise. Mr. Stellow looked at the guard. "He's been acting crazy, señor," explained the corporal uneasily.

"That will do," said Mr. Stellow. "Go back to your post. Well, Mederos?"

Quintín rubbed his bony wrists.

"Get up!" said Mr. Stellow.

"I don't know anything about it!" articulated Quintín. "I am innocent, señor! I—" Tears broke suddenly down his face, joining the sweat already running. "I am innocent, I am innocent, I am innocent, I am innocent—" his voice rose in a shrill scream. He dug his fingers into the sand. "You believe me, señor. You know I am innocent—"

"Get up!" said Mr. Stellow, "or I'll have you arrested."

The people beyond gaped, impressed. The corporal, who had returned to his post, stood apprehensive, gripping his rifle. Quintín made a jerky motion, rubbing his head on the ground.

"Arrest this man!" said Mr. Stellow. He started to move on.

Quintín came up erratically and screamed louder. He began to run, a grotesque flying progress over the sand.

"Halt!" shouted the corporal. "Halt, or I'll fire!"

Mr. Stellow wheeled about again.

The guard's rifle rose, leveled, and broke the hot stillness to bits. Quintín, twenty yards up the street, yelped and collapsed. Mr. Stellow stood quiet, looking at the corporal. The people at the

corner froze, entranced. You could almost hear their collective breathing. The corporal lowered his rifle.

"Resisting arrest, señor," he muttered.

Mr. Stellow made no comment, still looking.

"I'm sorry, señor," said the corporal sullenly.

"I lost my head."

"I didn't mean to kill him," he added.

"Well," said Mr. Stellow, "you don't really think you hit him, do you. It is fortunate you are so bad a shot."

"I lost my head," repeated the guard unsteadily.

"I'm afraid you'll lose your stripes, too."

"Yes, señor."

"Any complaint?"

"No, señor."

"All right. Arrest Mederos. He isn't hurt. Report to the sergeant. Tell him you're demoted. I'll have your conduct sheet. Your present pay can continue if I find that satisfactory. Number fourteen will have your place. Any complaint?"

"No, señor." The man paused, considering the fact that his corporal's pay would not stop. "Many thanks for your leniency, señor."

"All right. Keep calmer next time. Go get him."

Mr. Stellow continued down the street. He

didn't altogether blame the corporal. The whole place was on edge. Displeased, he decided he'd have to make an object lesson of the Alcalde if his excuse for turning out the guards and locking the railroad yards was not entirely adequate. No one but a fool would have managed the thing this way, getting the entire terminal so excited. Probably any man there would have behaved as senselessly as the corporal with his impulsive shooting.

Mr. Stellow reached the Casa and went in. The servants, standing expectant, bowed to him. Their enforced presence here had moved them much as the wait in the freight office had moved the Chief Clerk, now delivering the bag to the house boy with relief. They had all heard the shot, of course.

"Find the Alcalde," said Mr. Stellow, "and telephone for a couple of guards."

"There's an American I sent down here yesterday," he added.

Unreasonable, entirely irrelevant, the thought came to him that Findley must have something to do with this.

"I'll see him when I finish with the others. Just have a guard watch him. Coffee and some eggs in the back room."

"Señor. . . ."

Mr. Stellow turned.

"Will you see Dr. Palacios, señor?"

Mr. Stellow nodded. "Now," he said. He went forward and closed the door after him.

•2•

DR. PALACÍOS was still on the sugar boat when the Alcalde's order that no one should come ashore arrived. He had been talking to the captain about the seaman who had fallen, breaking his leg on the steep ladders of the fire room. Dr. Palacios had set it with difficulty because there seemed to be something wrong with the patient's heart. Local anesthetics were not very effective in a compound fracture. Dr. Palacios cursed darkly, as was his habit when his treatment proved painful to the patient. He cursed in English for the benefit of both patient and captain. His English was good, though when he said "God damn" it resembled most "gore dem." Every one understood.

The captain, a short Scotchman, religious by

nature, recognized the need for profanity in such circumstances. He had plenty of his own, when the sergeant boarded his boat. He regarded races that did not speak English as inferior to start with. He became rather Royal Navy. The Englishman's ship was his castle, but he was not going to be shut up in it. The sergeant did not know about his inferiority. One might say he became rather United Sugar.

Dr. Palacíós, bitter already because of the suffering he had, despite his efforts, caused the injured seaman, regarded them both with biting contempt. He had a sense of how relative and ridiculous man's dignity was, since his work habitually showed him men stripped of it by the operation of pain or the enervation of illness.

Finally the sergeant made his point. He did not speak English, thus losing the fine force of the captain's remarks, which might, such is the Royal Navy, have intimidated him. The Scotchman, faced by what he could only consider crazy foreigners bearing rifles and probably irresponsible in the use of them, went stamping away to order up a quarantine flag and write a complaint to some one.

Dr. Palacíós took his bag. He waved aside the men who were about to remove the gang plank.

"You may not go ashore, señor," said the sergeant.

Dr. Palacios showed the advantages of speaking Spanish by a few appalling remarks. He bristled, he shook his slender, competent fist in the sergeant's face. When he heard one, the sergeant knew a Cuban gentleman and like every one else he was afraid of the medical officer. Dr. Palacios marched down the gang plank, ignoring half-hearted protests, and straight off the pier. Arriving home, he went to his library for the book he wanted, sat down to breakfast with the volume propped against four others, absent-mindedly eating. He heard the train come in from Central Chicago, so he finished the chapter and set out to report to Mr. Stellow. As he came down the path he saw distantly the little group beyond the yard gates, the figure breaking away to run, the corporal's rifle whipping up and flashing.

"Pigs and imbeciles!" he snorted to the echo of the clean report. He turned about to get his bag again.

When he came out with it, Mederos was being taken to the guard house, apparently uninjured, so he cursed in fresh anger.

"Is that man hurt?" he shouted.

"No, señor."

“Well, it’s a sacred pity!” he shouted back and returned the bag to the house.

His indignation made him walk fast enough to overtake the Administrator’s casually measured progress. He came into the Casa only a few steps behind and stood, still hot with annoyance, by the door while Mr. Stellow gave his orders.

The anger which sharpened Dr. Palacios’ tongue never disturbed his thinking. He was too accustomed to living his characteristically cool and clear-headed mental life in the just-as-characteristic aura of impatience. It was not annoyance directed against the Administrator. His relation to Mr. Stellow was involved and curious, swaying between the ease of an acquaintance dating from days when everything was very different, to the constraint of a keen contempt, applied impartially both to the Administrator and himself. He avoided Mr. Stellow as much as possible when he was in Dosfuegos. He felt the nameless emotion of a person repaid for a service with one far greater than that which entailed the original obligation.

He knew that in a sense he had made Stellow what he was. Of course you could not make iron out of water, but it was a miracle of sorts he had performed with an ignorant youth suffering from

what one would expect, who picked by chance the office of young Dr. Palacios, just back from the University of Pennsylvania to his native Habana. Fernando Palacios was not very different in attitude then. He was violent over the success of the revolution. Although royalist by family and instinct, what enraged him was not so much the destruction of Spanish rule, as the fatuous popular belief that the Republic, supposing the United States did not show its sympathy by gobbling Cuba up, would be an improvement. He despised the people, he despised the moral platitudes of the American occupation, despised the whole world for its dirt, disorder and rampant asininity. Of course, when presented to him, he despised this young American, obviously a person of no family or breeding, for having got himself into trouble with the filth on Economía Street. He found the young man impressionable. Through illness and alarm and his failure to find the Habana he had run away to as quick a road to fortune as he expected, the boy was ready for advice. Habana was full of such people; adventurers, misinformed idiots, knaves, murderers, thieving contractors, corrupt officials, lease hunters—every form of rogue and rascal. It was then the last and worst American frontier, with the ethics and atmosphere

of all frontiers; life, depraved and violent; honor, non-existent; and fabulous money loose for the stealing.

Once away from liquor and back-street prostitutes, a matter now made necessary, Fernando Palacios found possibilities in Joel Stellow. There was the strong impersonality and intelligent ruthlessness of which all great men are made lying just under the crudeness and ignorance. It pleased the young doctor that he could see it. Cuba, which disgusted him, Dr. Palacios saw too, with the same clear-headedness through the murk of his irritation and distaste. Economics, the inevitable course of money-getting, was plain to him. Being well connected, he headed young Stellow straight. Sir William Van Horne had come to Habana. The Cuba railroad, through his juggling with franchises, would be a reality. That way lay fortune, and Dr. Palacios got Stellow into it, confident that the young man would make his own mark. It delighted him to be able to launch something far more potentially destructive to the imbecility of *Cuba libre* than arms or American annexation. Yankees of this type would soon enough make a mock of Cuban freedom, given the railroads and the sugar mills. An intimacy had grown up between them. The doctor, though still young, had

a maturity which the younger American was perceptive enough to appreciate. His sense of values was altered as he grasped the morality of ruthless good sense. The doctor, polished, cynical, now almost fond of his American, having restored his health, corrected his private life. They went together to establishments in La Gloria Street where men took their pleasures with taste and discretion. Dr. Palacios rid the boy of his notion that one drank to get drunk and then left the evening's end to chance. He made him over, directed him intelligently, dispatched him to the provinces with the railroad, and never expected to see him again.

Dr. Palacios had counted without the rise of the United Sugar Company. It was slow. Afterwards one could guess it was slow only until Joel Stellow had worked his way to the top. After that it gained momentum, standing up like a giant in the eastern provinces. Dr. Palacios, still in Habana, knew of it, saw his cynical foresight justified. Fifteen years had passed before he encountered Mr. Stellow again. It was a chance meeting, and a significant one. A year later, it would not have happened, probably, for the doctor would have been dead, dispassionately ready to end an existence of poverty very extreme. It was his own fault; he rebuffed patients, content with

the simple study of his science. By degrees, he came to add to the content with a needle. He was not an addict. He drugged himself skillfully and deliberately, with the unmoral precision he had shown in picking *rameras* in the exquisite La Gloria Street brothels.

Mr. Stellow proposed to him that he take a position. He did not afflict him with friendship, or burden him with offers of a sinecure. Would Dr. Palacios be the medical officer at the new sea terminal United Sugar was building. The Administrator described it in unflattering detail. But there would be a laboratory, plenty of leisure, an adequate salary. He could take it or leave it. If the doctor would rather move slowly toward suicide in Habana, that was no concern of Mr. Stellow's.

Dr. Palacios took it. His new life occupied him with its alternate leisure for study—he was probably the best-informed physician in Cuba, which tickled his irony—that his talent should be so magnificently wasted—and the trivialities of his medical duties. He experimented, worked, went through his routine with beautiful efficiency. Sometimes, when it seemed that there would be no immediate call for him, he drank himself quietly and completely insensible. Such girls in

the village as appealed to him, he seduced, gave them good advice on avoiding trouble. If necessary, he broke his Hippocratic oath with characteristically cynical skill. He had never allowed ethics to interfere with what he considered reasonable human happiness.

He thought of some of these things while Mr. Stellow instructed the servants. He was thinking of them still when he came into the office. Selectively, he took his relation to the terminal and considered that. He said, "Good morning, señor." Formal. Underneath the formality was a thought, twenty-five years old, of Mr. Stellow first coming into his Industria Street office.

It was more than a reversal of rôle. More, in Mr. Stellow's case. Change, the simple signal of growth, had made the doctor not much different. He was already Dr. Palacios in those lost, hopeful, confused days of the American occupation. Stellow had been no one, not to be distinguished from any hulk of a young fool lurching down Economía Street.

First directed by the doctor, the intelligence which would not tolerate such folly, hewed close to the hard bones of character. The human guts went out of Stellow, it seemed to Dr. Palacios,

leaving him brain chiefly. The hair, disappearing above the wide forehead, seemed eloquent, showing the skull outstanding. The innocence of surprise, the thoughtlessness of anger, the humanness of any appetite, any blind grasp at happiness—they were all gone, useless to the solid operative brain, the compact engine which built the United Sugar Company, built its possessor into the summit—Administrator General.

Dr. Palacios' resentment was not so keen as his amusement at how little either of them had known what was before him, how little any man can ever know.

Mr. Stellow answered him in Spanish, calling him doctor. His own nonsense exasperated Dr. Palacios for it was the same sort which the Scotch captain on the boat and the sergeant had displayed, impressing each other with their different dignities. He continued, "My business is of no importance," in English. "Why the hell don't you get an Alcalde who can manage things, Joel?" He pronounced it, Spanish, "ho-ale," an acknowledgement of past intimacy.

"It isn't any of his business, managing things," said the Administrator. "What's wrong?"

Dr. Palacios sat down. "Nothing," he said. "We've had one death." He was misunderstand-

ing deliberately. "And two births. I put them down as legitimate because the priest said he was going to marry the parents soon. Very damn interesting, isn't it?"

"No," agreed Mr. Stellow. "I want to get at the trouble. I don't like it. I sent down an American bum yesterday. Did you look at him?"

"Naturally not," responded the doctor. "I haven't had any time. That imbecile of an Alcalde sent me your order but the man had disappeared by then. I was up killing the old woman until God knows what time. Then the priest stepped into the gap. Actually didn't bother me until four o'clock this morning. She was dead when I got there, which saved trouble. Maybe she was poisoned, but it's hard to tell. I know she takes peyotl."

"Who was it?"

"The Hervas woman. You don't think she put a curse or something on the terminal?"

"It feels like that kind of trouble," admitted the Administrator. "Did you see our shooting match?"

"Of course," snorted Dr. Palacios. "Been that way since last night. What about the American?"

"I'm sending him away. Just wanted to know if you thought it would kill him. He drinks."

"And suppose it does?"

Mr. Stellow shrugged. "What makes you think the Hervas woman was poisoned?"

"God Almighty!" snapped Dr. Palacios.

"I wondered if somebody tried to kill her."

"Well, I'm not a detective," responded the doctor shortly. "Are you going to have the decency to bury her? The priest feels sad."

"The Company will take care of it."

"Encourage him to keep his rats quiet," nodded Dr. Palacios. "Marvelous! You manage to use even idiots in bathrobes. If he keeps making such a martyr of himself we won't be troubled with him much longer."

"Have to get another," Mr. Stellow pointed out.

"I hope not," declared Dr. Palacios. "He would be worse. This one is just a holy fool. You'd get a knave next time. Am I delaying you?"

"Not if you're getting ready to tell me anything."

"You can have this for what it's worth. Your Alcalde took your friend Vidal Monaga down to the pier a couple of hours ago. Rijo came back alone. He is the only one who could give orders to make all this mess, so it might be of interest."

"What else?"

"You don't suppose he killed your American, do you? I don't know, but of course I hear that he spent last night with the girl—what's her name?"

"You knew once, didn't you?" asked the Administrator.

"I can't see that is any reason for remembering now. Is there a U.S.C. on my private life? You'd be in a tight place if your esteemed friend were up for murder. Well, if you want a false death certificate, you can count on me, of course."

"I'll let you know if I do," promised Mr. Stelow. "Do you want to look at that American?"

"No, but I may if he's alive. If he's dead, too, I suppose. All Americans are impossible. It puzzles me why they can't get on together. What are you running this man out for?"

"You'll know, if you see him."

"Because, for a wonder, he's no damn use to you. Why don't you shoot him? I've got lots of certificates."

"I'll give him a break. You might take to him. He used to be what you call a gentleman."

"From America?" marveled Dr. Palacios, taking his hat. "But this is very sad! Imagine a gentleman sunk so low that a person of your antecedents runs him out. Perhaps you don't see the tragedy of it?"

"Perhaps not," admitted Mr. Stellow. "Antecedents don't impress me, unassisted. I have seen a good many examples."

"Thank you for that," bowed Dr. Palacíós. "I could quote Latin to you, but you have no education."

"No," assented the Administrator. "This Mr. Findley has, however. I won't caution you against believing anything he says."

"I enjoy liars too much not to recognize them," said Dr. Palacíós. "I would be honored, and so would my palace, if you cared to dine with me. I presume you will go fishing with Monaga."

"If everything is all right."

"Water finds its own level—" Dr. Palacíós shrugged. "I wonder what you'll be like in ten years? Old Monaga won't live forever. After that you'll be a kind of tree walking. Sometimes I don't think you're human now. I remember—" He broke off and grinned.

"Contact," said Dr. Palacíós. His eyes went dark. "A hundred years from now, when we're both rotten, and your God damned Company is bust, men will know what to make of you—that is, one or two will. The ones who have my intelligence and a hundred years of research I haven't got. They'll know what human contact means, and what happens to a man's glands when he gets

to be a Company instead of a person—then they'll take him out and shoot him, I expect."

Mr. Stellow waited, smoking, watching.

"Well, I'll tell you this. Hold on to your old man, for you're almost a monstrosity now. He suits you, I guess, that noble peasant."

"Not, however, fishermen's daughters," pointed out Mr. Stellow placidly.

"Listen, my friend," said the doctor, shrugging again, "on long voyages men have eaten rats, shoes. Well, if you do not want to dine with me, you do not have to. Though you needn't be afraid of either rats or shoes, so munificently does the Company pay for my soul."

"To-morrow night."

"I hear and obey," nodded Dr. Palacios. "Command me when you want the records falsified." He nodded again and went out.

• 3 •

THE back room in the Casa, where Mr. Stellow had his desk, was quite bare. The walls showed ranks of large-scale maps, every detail of that

difficult, intricate coast spread out for Mr. Stellow's inspection.

Pepe Rijo could not conceive how such maps were made. It typified the miraculous, unsparing way in which the United Sugar Company forced things into form, saw everything, knew everything.

Mr. Stellow would have him flat out, like a map, in a moment, Pepe knew. It couldn't be avoided, however. He had exhausted his emotional capacity. He was past the violent forms of fear which made him run up and down trying to escape. Now had succeeded a paralysis. Even Mr. Stellow's continued silence was powerless against that as Pepe stood by the door, shaking a little.

Mr. Stellow went on with his breakfast. He had a number of report sheets which he looked at while he drank coffee. Pepe received one glance from the Administrator when the man brought him in. It was five full minutes before Mr. Stellow gave him another. The Administrator pushed the breakfast tray aside, lit a cigarette, leaning back in his chair, and clasped his hands together.

Pepe Rijo managed to open his mouth. He

had intended to say, "Good morning," but the result was only a hoarse, agitated sound.

"Well," observed Mr. Stellow. "Some trouble, I suppose?"

It was mildly spoken, but there were undertones. One of them implied frankly that Pepe's actions would have grim consequences unless there had been very serious trouble indeed. Another indicated Mr. Stellow's doubt about there having been any such thing.

Pepe's head whirled back into complete confusion. He opened his mouth, tried to speak, shut it again and swallowed. Then he contrived to say, "No, señor."

"I am to understand that you closed the yards for no reason at all, Alcalde?"

"Yes, señor," answered Pepe Rijo.

The paralysis into which his terror had developed discouraged any attempt at defense. He had not the strength to stand up under such driving cross-examination as any explanation or denial would evoke. He wanted only to help Mr. Stellow assign quickly whatever punishment might appease the Company. He added, "For no reason at all, señor."

Mr. Stellow gazed at him and Pepe thought with curious relief: he's deciding now what he will

do to me. It would be all over in a moment; he would be in prison, safe from Mr. Stellow. A positive happiness flooded him, at the idea of being disgraced, reduced so low that the awful attention of the Company would never again be directed to him.

Mr. Stellow said, "I am waiting, Rijo."

Pepe knew what that meant. No escape! The quickly raised structure of his last perverted hope fell resoundingly and he lay crushed in the débris. The overwhelming unfairness of it pressed like a knife. Tears came into his eyes and began to move down his wizened cheeks. Although it was useless, he said desperately, "Mr. Stellow, aren't you going to send me to prison?"

"I am waiting, Rijo."

Pepe's small fists clenched in their palms. They came up and hammered hollow and frantic on his chest. "Nothing has happened!" he screamed. "Nothing has happened!"

The ensuing silence was tremendous. Pepe gaped at Mr. Stellow, stunned by his own outbreak. Finally he said, "I detained Vidal Monaga. I asked him to go into the pier. Into the room by the office. I locked the door." Pushing a numb hand into his dirty pocket he added, "Here is the key, señor."

"Why did you do that?" asked Mr. Stellow.

"I don't know, señor," gasped Pepe. "For no reason."

"You are quite sure there was no reason?" inquired Mr. Stellow.

"No, señor."

"You mean you are not sure, or there was no reason?"

"Yes, señor."

"There was no reason?"

"There was no reason, señor."

Mr. Stellow laid a watch on the desk. "If you do not remember the reason in one minute, I shall find some way to help your memory."

"Sacred Heart of Jesus!" shrieked Pepe. "How shall I remember what isn't, Mr. Stellow, señor!"

"Half that minute is gone."

"No, no, no!" shrilled Pepe. "Mr. Stellow, Osmundo Monaga went away. Disappeared. Gone. How do I know? What am I to do? Gone! Disappeared!"

"How?"

Pepe swayed a little on his feet, pushing across his forehead a hand that came away wet.

"That won't do, Rijo."

"Señor," gasped Pepe, "Vidal knows where

Osmundo went. That is all." He groaned and said, "Just until you came, Mr. Stellow."

"Well, what about the yards?"

"I don't know, señor."

"Think again."

"Because—" Pepe stammered. "Mr. Stellow," he said faintly, "it's because of the devil." Pepe's eyes bulged.

Mr. Stellow said: "Just be a little more explicit."

"Last night, señor, comes down an American, with Nida Monaga—"

"You mean Mr. Findley?"

"Yes, señor," choked Pepe.

"So he came down with Nida Monaga."

"Yes, señor."

"And you talked to him?"

"This morning, señor."

"All right. That's what I wanted to know."

Pepe Rijo breathed hard and wiped his face again. He squeezed his hands together, bracing himself. Mr. Stellow looked at him, and then right on through him to the maps on the wall.

"Get out!" said the Administrator. "Just wait outside."

MR. STELLOW, thoughtful, arose.

It did not occur to him to have Vidal Monaga brought over. Mr. Stellow's absolutism, so perfectly founded and practiced, set itself an arbitrary limit there. He thought as little of going to Vidal Monaga as he had of carrying his own bag.

The outer room was thronged. Mr. Stellow said, raising his voice above the murmur, "I want only the people I have sent for here. Clear the room."

To the corporal he added, "Arrest Señorita Monaga. I want to see her when I return."

The guards stirred themselves. He saw Oliver Findley sitting in the corner staring at the ceiling.

At the railroad yards Mr. Stellow sent the guards away, proceeding alone into the wharf and down to the offices.

Vidal Monaga sat quietly. Probably he had remained there, motionless in the morning shadows since Pepe Rijo left him. His big square face, brown as any lost Carib Indian's, had remarkable repose in its few wrinkles. The beard about its

flattened V of a chin grew with smooth thickness, a firm-rooted regularity supporting the whole countenance with strength and composure. Unruffled under the small hedges of eyebrows, his black eyes acknowledged Mr. Stellow's entrance with an unsurprised shift from grave abstraction to grave attention. Vidal Monaga stood up, the white mane of hair stirring a little.

"Good day, my friend," nodded Mr. Stellow.

"Good day to you, Mr. Stellow," said Vidal.

He had advanced one foot, forward and sideways; an instinctive pose. He might have been planting himself on a moving deck. His quiet brown hands were half into his trouser pockets. The rise and fall of his calm breathing moved slightly the shirt open on his broad chest, where the head of a mermaid, put on in his youth by a skill-less itinerant tattooer shared the movement over its uncouth green features, dull beneath the tan. Mr. Stellow held out a hand. Vidal took it firmly. They looked at each other and Mr. Stellow said, "Be seated."

Vidal nodded, waited while Mr. Stellow drew up a chair, and they both sat down.

At last Vidal said, "I thought it better to do away with my son, Mr. Stellow."

The silence returned. Water lapped loudly at

the pier bases. On the sugar boat a distant negroid voice was singing. It was a black man hanging out washing in the sunlight on the after deck, Mr. Stellow saw through the screened window. He looked back to Vidal and said, "Why did you think that?"

"To tell you would be hard," Vidal responded. "It seemed to me better. That is really all."

Mr. Stellow nodded. His eyes went back to the negro in the morning sunlight. Back beyond that, back he supposed twenty years. Nothing in Dosfuegos then. No wharves, no steamers, no railroads. Everything was overlaid, changed beyond recognition. He thought of it, because he thought how little Vidal had changed since the morning when, young himself then, he had come ashore from a fishing boat with a couple of surveyors—both dead now, those boys—and met Vidal on the beach.

Vidal had been swimming, he remembered. Vidal swam like a lion, paddling with artless, impressive strength, beyond where his two children, naked and brown, splashed in the shadows. Young Stellow had sat against a tree, waiting for him to come ashore, looking about and thinking. He thought of only one thing in those days. How United Sugar could move into Santa Clara prov-

ince, sketching on his maps, building in his mind the bold outlines of a south coast unit. Conceiving the new centrales, routing the new railroads. The Company with its antiquated offices and clumsy old mills never knew what was coming. But Stellow had known. He had seen the Dosfuegos of the new era even while he rested against the palm watching Vidal's head move up and down in the quiet water and sunlight.

When Vidal came back to the beach, Stellow knew already what he wanted; that he was going no further. Vidal was, by tacit consent, head man. He came up out of the sea shining, water streaming in films from his loincloth, shaking water from his hair and beard. Mr. Stellow met him half way, taking his thumbs out of his cartridge belt and shaking Vidal's wet hand. They faced each other, the naked children hiding behind Vidal's legs, Stellow in boots and breeches, with his surveyors chatting, indifferent, over their cigarettes a few steps in back of him.

He and Vidal, looking in each other's eyes, recognized each other without any word, any need for speech; each saw the other was strong, each gauged the other's possibilities as well as he was able. Perhaps the full meaning of Vidal's manhood was no plainer to the young engineer than

the full meaning of impending machines to the fisherman who had never seen an oil-burning locomotive or dreamed of a dynamo. But they understood well enough. Vidal turned with a gesture, sending away the little girl. He held his son's hand and walked slowly up the sand, talking to Mr. Stellow. The little girl remained frightened and fascinated staring shyly at the two surveyors.

So long ago!

Mr. Stellow did not believe that Vidal considered the past. His life, his vitality, was a thing of the perpetual present—the present of that morning on the beach, the present of this morning in the shadows. He had done away with his son now—the child whose hand he had held on the beach. That was another present. To-day's had no son of his. The years between, the pride, the affection, the concern of them, were laid away; so many pictures piled on a shelf, wholly past and as unreal as pictures.

Mr. Stellow said, "Tell me then how it happened."

"He drowned," returned Vidal Monaga. "It seemed to me best."

Mr. Stellow's cigar had gone out, so he lit it

again, extinguishing the match. The past was more important to Mr. Stellow for out of it rose the possibilities, the realities of the present; the sea terminal out of Dosfuegos; his power out of the men and machines growing like a tree, changing him from the mere symbol, the advance guard on the deserted beach, to the thing itself, the United Sugar Company made flesh, walking in the steel and concrete kingdom of its creation.

"Drowned?" he repeated. "When?"

"This morning."

"Where?"

"Out by the keys."

"How?"

"I pushed him overboard."

Mr. Stellow exhaled blue smoke and looked at the end of the cigar. "He was an excellent swimmer," he observed.

"He got no chance to swim, Mr. Stellow."

"How did that happen?"

"Barracuda," responded Vidal simply.

Mr. Stellow thought a moment of the big fish slashing through the water.

"We hove to off the little bank," amplified Vidal. "I had been throwing bait overboard for some time to bring them. I do not think he

noticed. There were ten at least. Large ones. He had no chance to swim. They were all on him in a moment."

"I would hardly call that drowning," observed Mr. Stellow.

Vidal Monaga nodded. "Only in a way," he assented, "but he was too good a swimmer."

Stillness settled once more. After a pause Mr. Stellow said, "I think that is clear. You caused the death of your son by pushing him from the fishing boat this morning. You had been throwing out bait to attract the barracuda. They attacked him and I presume devoured him. Is that correct?"

"Yes, Mr. Stellow."

"Why did you do this, my friend?"

"I do not care to answer that, señor."

They watched each other quietly.

"I would like to know more about it," remarked Mr. Stellow, gazing out the window again.

"Mr. Stellow," said Vidal, "I do not know whether you will understand." He paused, searching for words to say what had never seemed to him necessary to say. "My son," he said at last, "was like myself, a Monaga. That is, for me, a serious thing to be, Mr. Stellow. I do not

care if other people are different. They may be presidents of the republic and great men whom every one sees and knows. That is not important to me. That was not important to my son, for I had brought him up to know what is honorable. Other people may do things which are not my business, but with which I will not have myself, my house, my name, when it is borne by a man, dirtied. When I saw that he did not understand this, I thought to myself; my son is of age now, he is a man, grown up. Yet he does not know what it is to be a Monaga."

Vidal turned his eyes steadily on Mr. Stellow. "Being sure of this, I saw that he would be better dead."

"Thank you," said Mr. Stellow.

He looked at his cigar end. "Other people know of this?"

"I would not be surprised if that priest has pushed in by now."

"I see."

They both sat silent and Mr. Stellow smoked.

"There is no need for you to remain here," Mr. Stellow said. "If you are required, I will send to your home."

"I would rather remain here until such action as is decided on takes place, Mr. Stellow."

"Very well," agreed the Administrator. "I will have food sent over. Is there anything else you want?"

"No," said Vidal. "Thank you for your kindness, señor, but do not trouble about food, for I am not hungry."

Mr. Stellow laid the key on the table and went out, walking slowly through the great shadows of the wharf and across the blazing railroad yards.

At the Casa, the front room was almost deserted. Oliver Findley, slouched on his chair, looked at the ceiling. Pepe Rijo, hunched in the other corner, looked at nothing. A guard watched both of them curiously.

Turning about, Mr. Stellow saw another figure, by the window. The priest. Fray Alejandro raised his chin with a little jerk and pulled at the pendent crucifix and rosary chains at his waist. He looked anxiously, but did not say anything.

Mr. Stellow went and opened the door. He paused and inclined his head to the priest.

Fray Alejandro started. He hesitated a moment, and waddled rapidly over.

"Many thanks, señor," he mumbled, and went in.

NIDA, left alone when the Alcalde ordered Fray Alejandro from the Monaga house, stopped crying. She wiped her face, planting her elbows on the table. She laughed, loud and insultingly—the little rat Pepe and his God-cursed republic! The laugh she recognized at once was a mistake. It had an unpleasant sound, more like a scream. She shut her mouth tight and pressed her hands over her ears, trying to take stock of the situation.

Osmundo was gone, she knew, although no one had told her. Vidal would not bother with Nida, for she was of no importance to him. She had never been. If consciousness of this had galled her once, now she was shakily glad to know it. Things might come out all right, she decided, though not thinking any more closely about the details than she had to. Osmundo—gone! For what her father had done to Osmundo, Vidal might presently be gone. Viewed one way, good luck had allowed the two people who thwarted her to destroy each other. The part that luck, or some sinister destiny had played in this she did not find

so pleasant as she wished. There was something too dreadfully direct, too different from what her own cleverness might have accomplished.

She got up and found a package of cigarettes in a coat pocket. Osmundo's cigarettes. Well, he wouldn't want them now. She sat down at the table again, her face still tear-marked, heavy and brooding behind the curls of smoke. She did not want to think about Cuchita, but she knew that she was going to.

Cuchita was dead.

Nida recognized the terrible importance of it. Against her will, against the good sense of her scoffing, against every force she could bring to bear, the black powers would come back. And now there was no Cuchita; no key to them, no control. You laughed and shouted and thought of other things, buried the remembrance of them under a million details and preoccupations. But you knew they were still there. They would find some way to remind you, some awful and irrelevant way. Perhaps like—

Cuchita was dead.

They had gotten her at last then, as Cuchita had always known they would. One final magic that did not work. Some dreadful mistake about the goat, perhaps. It gave Nida a tight feeling under

her breast. She thought literally of Cuchita crouched over her fire, a sinister little slip, a fatal forgetfulness, and the bound demons were loose. Out of the smoke and dark, up from the fire and blood, they materialized like mountains and fell on their conjuror. Nida shuddered violently. They would carry Cuchita off. . . .

Only they hadn't.

Cuchita's body still remained, and Fray Alejandro would bury it.

Smoke curled up her lips. She drew more into her lungs, staring through it as it curled up and up. The cigarette scorched her fingers. There was nothing left of it. She dropped it into a cup half full of stale coffee, trying to think.

Fray Alejandro would bury Cuchita.

The demons had come for Cuchita, but Fray Alejandro . . .

She lit a new cigarette and forgot it in a crisis of partial comprehension. Like a pack of snapping dogs, unpleasant ideas, alarms, resentments, pursued and harassed her mind. She ran in front, searching in painful haste for the one safe spot where she could plant herself, the secure certainty of where her personal advantage lay. She saw no place, too closely followed by a hot indignation that Fray Alejandro should be right after all; that

his whole intolerable scheme of life should win so great a vindication. To Nida it seemed that life was ending, the joys of life and its tangible pleasures—all gone; all to be replaced with the barren negations of good people, good things, good actions. No joy left except that twisted and to her impossible, joy in one's own transcendent goodness; pleasure only in one's capacity for self-sacrifice and personal holiness. It was so plain, and her impotence so poignant that tears rose desperate in her eyes. The violence of this frustration seemed more than she could bear. She groaned, because she knew in her heart she would have to try bearing it; her desire to be on the winning, the profitable side, would overwhelm even her desire to be happy.

Thus she warred helplessly in herself. She was still sitting when a guard found her.

In one sense the guard's arrival was a rescue. She sprang to her feet, the dreadful conflict over a future, plainly to be barren and hopeless, replaced by the moment's acute alarm. The man's uniform, the long swinging machete, the boots and spurs and bright letters on his collar threw in her face the law and order of the United Sugar Company. It was in essence as alien and unbearable to her as the different law and order of Fray

Alejandro's God. Authority in itself meant nothing, the concept of duty or obligation carried no awe. Authority manifest in its enforcement was another matter, just as God manifest in the priest's victory over the dark powers was potent, while God hidden in Heaven was a joke.

She said mechanically, "Begone, Soldier! There's no one here."

Her voice was ridiculous, for she knew he had come for her. He explained this, disinterested. He was from Sancti Spíritus, or somewhere in the back country and did not know people in Dosfuegos. Nida sat down again and managed to say, "Well, I'm not going, Soldier."

"You'll go all right," he replied, surprised. "Now be quick."

He was a big man, strong and serious looking. Stolid, too. He would not like to drag her over, perhaps, but he would do it if he had to. The futility of making the sort of scene which might embarrass one of the local men was apparent to her. More apparent was the impossibility of seeing Mr. Stellow. She wasn't going to have him talking to her, so she sat still. When the guard put out a hand, she sank her teeth into it deftly and bit until the blood ran.

It was some satisfaction to hear him curse. He

paused a moment, his attention wholly devoted to the base of the bitten thumb, laid open. Nida made the mistake of using this opportunity to snatch at his machete. The guard was taken by surprise again, but he acted with admirable quickness. He brought one knee up as hard as he could, catching Nida, as he planned, in the stomach, high enough to knock her wind out. It destroyed entirely her interest in any further resistance. He picked her up off the floor, unconcerned by her convulsive efforts to get air into her lungs again, tossed her on his big shoulder and marched out the door, sucking his bleeding thumb.

Nida, for the few appalling moments after that efficient knee prostrated her, was deprived of any power to think at all. When she began to get her breath again, realizing that she was not dying, as it had at first seemed certain, her head was a great deal clearer. The agonizing physical shock brushed the mental and emotional confusion from her mind. Gulping in the air, she forgot black powers and God and the horrors of choking to death. She even forgot fear of Mr. Stellow. What concerned her was the ridiculous spectacle she must make on the guard's shoulder, like a sack of meal.

"Set me down, Soldier," she panted, "I'll walk."

The guard said, "Well, walk, and do not run. And keep your teeth in your mouth, little dog."

He placed her on her feet and steadied her, quietly confident that he could frustrate just as conclusively any second attempt at violence. He was not angry, now that his thumb hurt less, for he admired spirit—chiefly because it had never prevailed against his own unimaginative stolidity. He could not have been spirited himself, so he did not mind a chance to demonstrate that he didn't need to be.

In the outer room he pointed at a chair and stood by the door with the other guard. "That baby shark bit me," he explained candidly enough, being questioned about his hand. He tied it up with a handkerchief.

Oliver Findley took his eyes down from the ceiling and laughed quietly, overhearing. Nida, emboldened, joined the laugh. The guard said, "If you cannot be orderly here, señor, I will have to take you for a walk until the señor Administrator requires you."

"Mayn't I talk, General?" asked Oliver Findley.

Nida laughed again. Her universe steadied around her. Things fell back into place. The

world was full of its fools, rich with the possibilities of plunder; safe to scheme in, literal and secure. She said, "These girl-beaters make their own orders, but no one pays attention to them, for the Company kicks them out too soon."

As, in fact, the guard had no further orders, he solaced himself by ignoring her. Nida relinquished him contemptuously, flashing a quick look on Oliver Findley, hopeful for his applause.

• 6 •

AFTER Pepe Rijo ran away from him Oliver Findley had gone on laughing. The strut of small authority, the pathetic pretension, had nothing to do with Oliver Findley's amusement, even when they had been lost in that ludicrous pop-eyed stare and breathless voice. In a way it was not even amusement that made him laugh. It was admiration, he decided, for the caprice of a just, eloquent and mighty fate. He wondered how Mr. Stellow would like it. Farewell, King . . . he thought, groping; farewell, king. . . . He remembered

suddenly . . . *with a little pin: Bores through his castle wall, and farewell king!*

He had not thought of anything else, content with the futility of it all, with the stale mirth of the Antic keeping his court. The crack of the corporal's rifle brought him out of it. He thought, without even turning, the guns of the enemy! The conception had a magnificent quality. Mr. Stellow had arrived. He had reconnoitered the strong position of death and fate. He threw out his skirmish lines and said, "Commence firing!"

Oliver Findley filled his glass. "Our country," he nodded to Cipriano, who gripped the bar, peering aghast through the doors, "may she always be right. . . ."

He got to his feet. "I expect I shall be wanted," he said, "just save the bottle, señor."

In the street he saw, a long way ahead of him, Mr. Stellow with the man carrying his bag. Through the yard gates a guard was dragging another person. Well, well, thought Oliver Findley, grinning, got a prisoner! Death, do you think, or fate?

He walked sedately up the street and at the door of the Casa encountered the man who was coming for him.

Oliver Findley sat, he supposed an hour, in the

outer room. First a room full of people, people whispering and gasping and pushing about, then when the Administrator ordered his guards to clear them out, alone with the Alcalde, who sat quivering, pretending he was not there. Afterwards the priest came in and stood by the window, restless and troubled. The guards were the only ones who enjoyed it. They were on the right side, the winning side; the side which had just administered a sharp defeat to fate. The losers—himself, the Alcalde, the priest, too, probably—had no organization, no spirit. Certainly he had no spirit. He would like to have seen confusion sweep down on them all, to reawaken the grim spectacles of growing disaster, to feel again the warm urge to laughter at their imbecile excitement, their futile efforts to save themselves.

Nida came in then.

She had spirit enough. She had been frightened but she was getting over it. Hers was the one perdurable spirit, the one reliable human strength, her unspoiled, unassailable selfishness. Oliver Findley felt at once as though a weapon had been given him; some literal, obvious instrument like a spiked mace thrust into his hand. Something to smash things with if he had the strength and wit to fasten his grasp on it.

He saw, looking at Nida, that she might spare him even that trouble. She looked at him with the warmth of a fellow conspirator. "So you are here, too," she said, turning from the guard.

"I am wherever Mr. Stellow wants to put me," he shrugged, "but I wish I were in Habana."

"Well, why don't you go?" inquired Nida. She added suddenly, "I am going."

"I couldn't," said Oliver Findley.

Nida looked at him. "I suppose you have no money," she said. "Well, how would you like to go with me? I have money."

The proposal, Oliver Findley realized, was for her own satisfaction. A quick yielding to the temptation to triumph where she had heretofore been at a disadvantage. Oliver Findley said, "Ten dollars wouldn't go very far. And what would I do with you when I got you there?"

"Ten dollars!" cried Nida. "I have more money than you have ever seen, probably. I shall have more still now. And if you could not think of what to do when you got there, you are a great fool and I am sorry I spoke to you."

"It is useless, señorita," said Oliver Findley politely. "You would not be happy there. People are different. It is true; I am a great fool, to think of going with you."

"You think, I suppose," said Nida, "that I could

not take care of myself with your friends. I will tell you this, that city people don't bother me. You would soon find out who was cleverer."

"Then why don't you go alone, if you are so sure I could be of no use to you?"

"I did not say that," objected Nida, "but if you do not care to go, God knows I won't urge you."

"And if I did care to go?"

"Well, then you could come, and I would show whether I could get along or not."

"So you say now. You may think differently after Mr. Stellow has scared the heart out of you."

"Mr. Stellow!" said Nida. She spat precisely on the floor.

"You will stop doing that, señorita," warned the guard.

"You think I cannot take care of Mr. Stellow?" asked Nida, ignoring the interruption. "Much I care for him!" She looked the guard fairly in the eye and spat on the floor again.

"The next time I will choke you so you cannot spit," promised the guard.

"I know you are very brave," admitted Oliver Findley. "I would not be surprised if Mr. Stellow were afraid of you. But I do not think he is so afraid of you that he will let me go to Habana just because you say so."

"I do not know why I trouble about you, since

you have brains enough only to make fun of me,” cried Nida. “You can rot here, for all I care, if you do not learn to behave yourself. As for Mr. Stellow, we shall see in good time.”

“In good time,” agreed Oliver Findley. “Well, now, I must ask you to excuse me a moment, señorita.”

Oliver Findley arose and went to the guard. He explained with all delicacy that it was necessary for him to leave the room. To this the guard finally agreed. Oliver Findley selected the door next to Mr. Stellow’s office with assurance and walked down the passage.

Back there would be the kitchen; and a pantry, or serving room along here. Oliver Findley supposed he would have to risk the servants. He opened the door that he thought would be the pantry, and it was. No one in sight. He was reminded of the unpleasantness at Central Chicago. Not a great deal they could do to him now, and he really wasn’t stealing much of anything. He recognized the high probability of things drinkable being kept locked up. A few moments rapid and painfully soundless search convinced him that they were. On one shelf was a bottle labeled *alcoholico*. Probably denatured. It had no poison label, though.

Oliver Findley stared at it a moment; shrugged finally. Well, there was only one way to find out. He thought of stories from the States about death and blinding. You were blinded if you only took a little.

"Well, we won't run that risk," he murmured.

He found a glass and poured it more than half full, held it up and looked at it. Then he filled the rest with water and looked at it again.

His mouth twisted a little and his eyes slanted more.

"Oh, hell!" he said wearily and tilted it down.

It was strong. Hearteningly and pleasantly so. Didn't prove it wasn't poison. About that he would just have to wait and see. He put the bottle back, wiped his mouth, and returned to the front room. He could feel a slight color coming into his face. Inside he was warm and strong. He nodded civilly to the guard and sat down again. Nida looked at him, and he saw that something had happened to her, something which had disturbed her enough to make her waste no preliminaries.

"I have thought of one thing," she said to him.

After a moment she went on: "I am not sure that Mr. Stellow would let anything happen to my father."

"For murder?" inquired Oliver Findley, suddenly attentive.

"Mr. Stellow would not care about that," said Nida.

Oliver Findley's mind worked faster with the stimulus of his warm stomach. He was astonished to see that whatever might be her superficial simplicity, elemental and animal perceptions were keen enough.

"But there might be other people," he said.

Nida laughed unpleasantly. She said, "There are no other people besides Mr. Stellow, señor."

Oliver Findley saw then what it was that made her so discerning. The danger of defeat or disappointment. Considering plans and pleasures in Habana she was fantastic; facing difficulties, examining obstacles in Dosfuegos, some refinement of selfishness made her wise.

"Just the same, señorita, there is a law."

"You talk like a fool," retorted Nida, tense with her own perplexity. "There is no law here except the Company." She pointed a quick finger at Pepe Rijo, still hunched unseeing in the other corner. "Little rat, little rat," she cried to him, "how is your 'Name of the Republic' now?"

Pepe heard and winced, but he was too sunk in his own despair to give her any other attention.

The guard said: "Do not molest the prisoners, señorita."

"Don't feed or annoy them, either," suggested Oliver Findley. He was lulled beyond qualms about what that stuff he drank might have been. He even saw a possibility. "Do not forget, señorita, that if the case is as you say, Mr. Stellow will not want you talking about it."

Nida shot out a hand to his arm. "And then you will come to Habana with me?" she asked.

"Then I will come to Habana with you," agreed Oliver Findley.

The door opened. Into the room came the priest. Behind showed Mr. Stellow's calm dark face and solid linen-clad form.

"I'll see you now, señorita," he said, and held the door open.

• 7 •

"IT will not do you any good to order me around," observed Nida, "because I am not going to stay here."

The mildness with which the Administrator offered her a chair disturbed her. She struck out against it, resenting his noncommittal calm. "If your bank has not stolen it from me," she said, "I am going to take my money and go to Habana."

She sat down and jerked her skirt into place, looking at him angrily across the desk. "I am going with Mr. Findley, too," she stated.

Mr. Stellow rang a bell and out of the smaller room behind came a young clerk. "I want you to take a statement from señorita Monaga," said Mr. Stellow, leaning back.

"Well, he will get nothing," said Nida, "so he can put that thing away." The clerk had seated himself and she swung one foot in a well-directed effort to kick the folded pad out of his hands. It was too far away, so she struck his shin instead. The boy rubbed it and said nothing.

"You do not wish to make a statement?" inquired Mr. Stellow.

"What I wish is none of your affair, señor. I will not make anything for you, so you may as well let me go."

"All right, Roberto," nodded the Administrator. "Get out."

He pulled open a desk drawer and produced a sheet with a typewritten paragraph.

"I am not interested," said Nida. "Leave me alone!"

"You had better read it before you sign it," suggested Mr. Stellow. He took a cigar out of the case on his desk and squeezed it between his fingers.

"I shall not sign anything," said Nida.

"Then I do not see how you and Mr. Findley can go to Habana," said the Administrator, "for unless you can sign a statement that you know nothing about the matter, I shall have to detain you as a material witness."

"What do you mean, material witness?"

"I mean some one whom I intend to detain," answered Mr. Stellow calmly.

"You cannot detain me," asserted Nida, "for I have done nothing."

"You are not foolish enough to believe that," said Mr. Stellow. He turned the sheet of paper about and pushed it toward her. "Can you read?" asked Mr. Stellow.

"Better than you," snapped Nida. "You need not think I am a fool."

She studied the paragraph a moment.

"That," she said suddenly, with rising triumph, "I shall never sign! I know what my father did!"

Don't you think I saw them fighting? Don't you think—"

"Don't you think, señorita," said Mr. Stellow, lighting the cigar, "that you had better not talk so loud?"

"I will talk as loud as I please and as often as I please! He has killed Osmundo, and now you are going to pretend that he didn't. Very well, we shall see."

"If you know all that," agreed Mr. Stellow, "you are a material witness. There is nothing to do but send you up to Sancti Spíritus to be kept in jail until the trial."

"You will not have any trial!" cried Nida. "It is for that reason that you try to make me sign this great batch of lies. You do not frighten me, señor."

"That is true," said Mr. Stellow, leaning forward. "There will probably be no trial, señorita, if you sign this paper."

"You admit it!" cried Nida.

"I have just told you, if that is what you mean."

Nida sat silent, studying him under her sullenly lowered eyelids. "How do I know that if I sign this you will not cheat me?"

"You don't know," said Mr. Stellow. "That

is a chance you will have to take, señorita. When you have signed it, I will pay your passage to Habana, if it is there you want to go."

"That will be of no use," said Nida, throwing out a hand, "unless you will also pay Mr. Findley's."

Mr. Stellow looked out the window at the sunlight on the red tile roof beyond.

"Yes," said Mr. Stellow finally. "If, when you go, you want Mr. Findley to go with you, that will be arranged."

"I have said that I want it, señor."

"You will not be able to go until to-morrow, señorita."

"Very good," said Nida, putting a palm flat down on the table. "I suppose I must believe you. Give me a pen."

Mr. Stellow rang the bell. To the clerk, re-entering, he said, "Draw up a certificate of signature for me, and ask one of the guards to step in."

"I will not sign anything else," said Nida quickly.

The Administrator turned his head. It was not for her to sign, he explained. "You will say in the hearing of these witnesses that you sign the other paper of your own free will."

"And suppose I will not say that, since it is not true, for I am signing it only because you would try to send me to jail, although I have a perfect right to do what I please?"

"That," said Mr. Stellow patiently, "would be the same as though you had not signed the paper. I have already explained to you what I would do."

The typewriter, clicking briefly in the back room, stopped. The clerk passed through, returning with a guard. Nida saw, relieved, that it was not the one whose thumb she had bitten.

"Tell these men, please," said Mr. Stellow.

Nida looked at them. "What, for the love of God, shall I tell them?"

Mr. Stellow said, "Read the certificate to her."

"All right," said Nida, "that is the way it is."

Mr. Stellow dipped a pen in ink and held it out to her. Nida waved the sheet rattling in the air to dry the sprawling letters. "Keep your fists off it!" she snapped to the clerk.

"He has to seal them together," explained Mr. Stellow. "That will be all, señorita."

"Well, where is my ticket to Habana, if you have not cheated me, as I expect?"

Mr. Stellow pulled out a blue order form and scribbled on it. "You will wait in the outer office," he said.

"I want to go home," said Nida.

"You may go home in an hour," said Mr. Stellow.

"Let me see that!" cried Nida. She thrust out a hand and snatched the pad, looking suspiciously at the jumbled *J. B. Stellow Admr.* "One first-class passage to Habana!" she read. "And Mr. Findley, señor? If you have cheated me, I will soon tell how I signed all that foolishness!"

"I have already told you that if you wish Mr. Findley to go with you when you go, he will have his passage."

The men had gone out and they sat alone, facing each other across the desk.

Nida whipped out a hand and pointed at him. "You are going to kill Mr. Findley!" she said suddenly. "I know what you mean. Very good, señor! Lay one finger on him, and I will tell every word I know. Perhaps you think you will kill me too? I am not afraid of you, señor. I—"

"You are talking nonsense," said Mr. Stellow. "No one will harm Mr. Findley."

"Much your promises are worth to me!"

"I am afraid you will have to accept them," said Mr. Stellow. He arose and opened the door. "Findley," he said, "step in here."

Oliver Findley came, shutting the door after him.

"I'm cleverer than you are, Findley," said Mr. Stellow. "Don't forget it. I have an idea you'll sail to-morrow. This afternoon I'll let you out. Have you any money?"

"Not much, sir."

Nida watched sullenly, baffled by the English.

Mr. Stellow took out a bill-fold. He extracted a five-dollar bill. "I suppose I can find you at the café if I need you," he observed.

"Very likely, sir."

Mr. Stellow laid the bill on the desk. "If you want that, you can have it," he said.

"Thank you, sir."

"Be careful, Findley. I never give a bum an even break."

"All right, sir. I'll just take that cigar you said I could have, too."

"Take three or four," suggested Mr. Stellow.

He opened the door again and watched them go out.

"I am releasing Mr. Findley," he said to the guard. "I shall be busy for a little while, but the other two you will continue to detain."

He watched Nida sit down resentfully. Oliver Findley bowed to her and went out into the street.

Mr. Stellow put on his hat. "You may smoke, if you want to," he told the guard, "and you don't have to stand there, if you'd rather sit on the steps outside."

The guard followed him out, settling down comfortably and producing a paper package of cigarettes.

"Just keep an eye on that door," said Mr. Stellow, stopping and turning. "If they want to talk to each other, let them."

"Yes, señor."

Mr. Stellow proceeded down the plank walk.

VI

TWILIGHT OF THE MACHINES

ALL the way to the yards Mr. Stellow saw no one. That was something to be proud of. Almost anywhere else no more work would have been done that day. Dosfuegos was different. Things were always different where the United Sugar Company took hold.

The Administrator passed through the gates and heard the faint racket of typewriters in the freight office. From the telegraph room a boy ran down the steps and came to him with a handful of blue telegram forms. Mr. Stellow stuffed them into his pocket and walked up the path to the barracks. The little chalk-white building of the guard house stood apart. On the stone steps, reclining in the shadow, were two guards, who came to their feet.

"I'll go in," stated Mr. Stellow, waiting.

"He's violent, señor," ventured one of them. The other produced the big keys. "Shall I go first, señor?" he asked, turning the lock.

"No," said Mr. Stellow, "you can stay out here."

The outer door opened, and then the inner.

Through the high barred windows on the west, sun poured blinding into Mr. Stellow's eyes. The small interior, immaculately white-washed, was filled with radiance. Mr. Stellow shut the door and stood looking thoughtfully at the far wall. Second added to second and he never moved.

Behind him, a little to his right, rang out metal suddenly on stone. Mr. Stellow faced around and looked at Quintín Mederos, leaning against the wall. He moved a foot touching the open clasp-knife on the flagging.

"Just pick that up," he said. "We'll forget about it. Sit down, Mederos, and let's hear your trouble."

Quintín Mederos' long horse-like face with the wet shaggy gray hair crowning it, wrinkled and went to pieces. Enormous glittering tears appeared in front of his eyes. He made a hard, gasping sound, more like steam under pressure than anything human.

"Sit down," repeated Mr. Stellow. He sat down himself on the bench and leaned back against the wall, taking off his panama and fanning slowly. From his pocket he brought the sheaf of telegrams and began to look at them. Quintín Mederos wiped the tears out of his eyes with a

dirty hand, limped over to the other corner of the bench and lowered himself onto it. He swallowed, wiped his face again, and swallowed again.

At length he managed to say, "I am innocent, señor."

Mr. Stellow nodded, looking up from the telegram forms. "Of what are you innocent?" he inquired.

Quintín Mederos shook violently. The bench moved a little. "I am innocent," he gasped.

"You did not do it," agreed Mr. Stellow. He took out a pencil and scribbled a note on one of the telegrams. "Then it must have been some one else." His deep tones moved peacefully in the golden light filling the bareness of the small room. He fanned himself.

"Some one else," said Quintín. He clutched his hands on the deformed knee. "I have not seen Cuchita since she bought a dead goat from me," he quavered.

Mr. Stellow nodded, fanning.

"My goat died," said Quintín Mederos. "I had no reason for not selling it. I do not know why it died."

Quintín Mederos clutched his knee tighter. "I never said Cuchita killed my goat," his voice came thinly. "I was buying another goat, even then.

I had made arrangements, señor. It is at my home now. A black goat, which I paid for. If Cuchita killed my goat, why wouldn't I have said so, and made her pay for it?"

"That is quite clear," agreed Mr. Stellow, folding the telegrams. "Go on."

"Then why would I have wanted to kill Cuchita?" pleaded Quintín.

"But some one killed her?" inquired Mr. Stellow. He put the forms back in his pocket and turned his gray eyes suddenly on Quintín.

Quintín's small blue ones seemed to swell in his head. He gaped at Mr. Stellow. "Yes, señor," he articulated.

"How?"

"By poisoning her," faltered Quintín. He breathed faster, his eyes wider and wider.

"What kind of poison?" asked Mr. Stellow.

"Rat poison," gasped Quintín.

"In what way?"

"Mixed into a food pot," said Quintín faintly.

"Why would any one want to do this?"

"She was a witch." Tears began to run on Quintín's furrowed cheeks, but his eyes never moved from Mr. Stellow's. "She had the evil eye. She killed people's goats."

Mr. Stellow drew a deep breath. He looked

away from Quintín who crumpled slowly on the bench, as though a prop had been removed. Mr. Stellow looked at his own hands. Then he took another breath and gazed at the blue sky, hot and calm behind the high window slits.

"At Central Chicago," said Mr. Stellow, "we could use another checker at the scales office."

He paused and considered Quintín, squeezed into the corner.

"You would not have to understand figures very much. Simply check car numbers as they passed."

"You could learn," decided the Administrator. "I think you would like it better at Central Chicago. There are more people, more things to do. You would not be alone so much. There is a Sociedad where they have motion pictures. I want you to get your things together and go up to-night."

Quintín Mederos thrust his head into the corner. "I am innocent!" he whined.

Mr. Stellow stood up. He moved toward the door, pausing to put a hand on Quintín's shoulder. He said, "Everything is past, Mederos. I'll send some one to help you with your boxes."

Mr. Stellow opened the door. "This man is at

liberty," he told the guards. "And you may be relieved now."

He put on his hat. He made his way slowly down toward the freight offices.

· 2 ·

ON the steps outside the Casa, leaning back with a shoulder against the screen door, the guard smoked his cigarettes, extinguishing them carefully and collecting them in a little pile, convenient to remove when he left. One did not throw things around in Dosfuegos.

Between cigarettes he reëxamined the hand that Nida had bitten and whistled the *Idilio Mar Caribe*. Coming from Sancti Spíritus, he did not know that the tune had been devised a few hundred yards away where, behind the houses, the last of Osmundo's boat waited unfinished. Had he known, he would not have been interested. He was concerned with a melancholy minor passage which reminded him of a girl. Not any girl of

his acquaintance, but a girl he would like very much to meet. He wished that there were such a girl, and that she could see him, fine-looking in his uniform; competent, fearless, trusted, favored by Mr. Stellow of Central Chicago, who said to him: "I know you can handle things so there's no need for you to stand up against the wall like a dummy. Make yourself comfortable, señor. . . ."

Inside, the shadows grew longer.

Pepe Rijo roused himself. Incapable of sustaining any intense thought or feeling over so long a period, he even grew restless, though he did not move from his chair.

Nida continued to think about Habana, how she had outwitted Mr. Stellow, how pleasant it would be to go there with Oliver Findley. At the end of an hour her enthusiasm had mounted until she could no longer contain herself. She turned to Pepe Rijo and observed: "A fine mess you've got us all into with your arrestings and detainings. It doesn't matter to you, for you never have anything to do, but I shall miss the Habana train to-day."

Pepe Rijo's restlessness had so far increased that he was ready to overlook the injustice of this for the sake of that great comforter, human speech.

He returned, "Well, you needn't talk to me that way. If your mad horse of a father hadn't—"

Nida made a derisive sound.

"I did no more than my duty," persisted Pepe. "If you read instructions for Alcaldes, you will see that the civil peace must be maintained by me." That phrase so encouraged him that he tapped himself on the chest and repeated, "By me. If you knew more—"

"Who wants to know more about yokels?" inquired Nida rudely. "I shall be in Habana to-morrow."

Pepe Rijo gave it reluctant attention. "How will you go to Habana, I should like to know," he asked skeptically.

"By the train, chico, by the train," explained Nida, tolerant, "and if the Company were not going to send me, I would use the money I won in the lottery." She stuck out her tongue at him and Pepe went vividly red.

There was however nothing he could say. He endeavored to turn the subject by cordiality.

"Well, I hope you enjoy yourself," he asserted. His inner indignation made it more like a snort.

Nida leaned back in her chair and laughed. "I'm going to Habana," she repeated triumphantly. "I'm going to Habana with Mr. Findley,

the American. I'll send you a post card, chico."

Pepe Rijo looked at her, his little eyes narrow with resentment.

"With the American," he nodded. Then he too burst into squeaking laughter. "Well, after Habana, he will have somewhere else to take you."

A curious change came over him. His terror of the morning had long since faded, lost in other terrors. Yet with the phrase, "somewhere else to take you" he felt, small and far-away like drums over the mountains, a tremor marching on the skin of his back. In shocking resurrection, his identification of Findley's narrow face with the half-hid countenance of the moonlit rider on the Sancti Spíritus road broke from the dull earth of his mind.

Pepe had not known exactly what he meant to do, beyond annoying Nida if that were possible. Now it was taken entirely out of his hands. The drums beat louder and nearer. He rubbed his palms, which had grown a little wet, together and said, "Señorita, what does that man look like?"

"Look like?" echoed Nida. Something in Pepe's tone communicated itself to her, for she went on with unnecessary impatience, "What idiocy are you talking now?"

Pepe was too much moved by his own thoughts

to be checked by her tone. He whispered, "Do you know who that person is?"

"He's an American," answered Nida violently. "What eats you, little man?"

Pepe's laughter rose in one brief tremulous squawk. Nida leaned forward, her face heavy with anger, with an unreasonable, incomprehensible alarm, too. She said, "Make less of that noise, or I'll hide a knife in you."

Pepe stopped readily enough, for he did not feel like laughing. All over him advanced the creeping cold tremors. "Who does that face make you think of?" he insisted tensely. "Who, señorita?"

"In the name of God, no one!" snapped Nida.

"You are lost then," said Pepe quietly. He brought his arms close against his quivering body and hugged it. His voice sank to a mechanical murmur. "Who walks up and down on the earth, seeking whom he may destroy? Who, señorita? Who?"

Nida gave a screech of laughter. "Ha, little man," she cried. "You think you frighten me?"

"You don't see the face," said Pepe. The drums behind him drowned her mockery. "You don't see it. You are glad to go to Habana with him. He will take you farther than Habana,

señorita. I look at him, and I know who he is. He is too close to you. He has you already. Last night he was with you, and to-morrow he will take you away."

"You rat, with your stories—" began Nida.

"Where he goes, there goes death," continued Pepe. His tongue was loosened; the ecstasy of his terror took him entirely. "Last night, señorita. Think of last night!"

"All day yesterday," panted Pepe, "it was clear and bright here. But last night . . ."

Nida might have said something. Her tongue refused to move. A stiffness came over her face.

"Late yesterday afternoon," whispered Pepe, "a gas-car started from Central Chicago. It got black here, and blacker. It was hot. Men went about not knowing what they were doing. At twenty minutes after eight, the gas-car arrived. At twenty minutes after eight, every light in Dos-fuegos went out. Ask them at the dynamos why that was. They do not know, señorita. Everything seemed all right, but the light stopped."

Nida stared at him, opened her lips, and closed them again.

"In a little while," said Pepe, putting out a hand and touching her arm, "they sounded the first hurricane warning."

Nida shook off the hand violently. "I have seen worse storms," she articulated.

Pepe raised a shaking finger and pointed it at her. "Last night," he said, "that witch Cuchita died. She had her magic. She had her powers. But last night the Devil came. And she knew it," said Pepe, his voice rising. "She knew it! She sent for Fray Alejandro. She—"

Nida screamed.

"Señorita, señorita," said Pepe, raising his voice still higher, "who is this man, then? What sort of man is that? He came to your house, señorita. What happened, señorita—"

"Do not tell me what happened!" cried Nida, backing hard against the chair.

"Señorita," said Pepe, breathless, "already one person from that house is dead. Another will be taken away for murder. The third will be carried away. To Habana?" he shrilled. "To Habana?"

"No, no, no!" Nida pressed her hands to her mouth.

"Who," whispered Pepe, "walks up and down on the earth, seeking whom he may destroy?" He bent forward, shaking so he could hardly keep his seat. "Who? Who?"

Nida clutched her throat.

Pepe sat up so sharply that the chair rocked under him.

"Listen!" he gasped. "Listen!" He held up a hand.

Calm, clearly sweet and leisurely, whistling drifted into the shadows.

"Who is that?" whispered Pepe.

They stared at each other.

"Whose music is that?" demanded Pepe shakily.

"Osmundo's," Nida managed.

"And who would be whistling it now? Who whistles like that? Can't you tell it, señorita?"

"Who?" choked Nida.

"Osmundo!"

"He is dead," Nida moaned.

"But he could come back, señorita. He could warn you. . . ."

It was later now. People were passing up the sunset street. The guard outside the Casa lit a new cigarette. He was hungry. Soon he hoped he would be relieved. Inside they had been doing a lot of shouting and talking, but Mr. Stellow had said to let them talk, so it was none of his business.

OUT into the street, full of the late sun, Oliver Findley walked, leaving the café.

His shadow stretched thin, enormously long on the sand. Following it with his eye, he looked up, saw the clear blue of impending evening over the railroad yards. Unfathomable blue, sky like cool water beyond the signal towers, the high roofs, the round house with scarves of smoke drifting north. A long black locomotive had moved clear and waited, pointed toward the beginning of the viaduct. Against the lucid eastern sky it held up a stiff plume of steam. On its tender Oliver Findley could see the exquisitely clean letters—*Central Chicago*. Going back, he thought.

The conception struck him as interesting. It might have been going back to yesterday. Tomorrow, beyond the southwestern water; yesterday, at the end of those polished rails. Now; to-day; was here under his feet. Santa Clara Terminal. Except that it wasn't that. There lay the mistake. This ground, this spread sand with the flat sunlight on it, was where he should stay.

He was glad to have escaped from yesterday. Nothing could make him take that train back. He had no hope or interest for to-morrow. This ought to be terminal, fixed eternally in now. But there is nothing, he thought, so sure as to-morrow.

He walked through the gates of the railroad yards, approaching the train waiting.

It was going out presently. The engineer leaned from the cab window, his canvas gloves dangling in one hand, a cigarette in the other. The jefe of the train and the train despatcher stood under the flank of the boiler exchanging papers and chattering. A couple of oilers waited by the tall drive-wheels with long spouted cans, in no hurry to get back to the round-house. Ahead of Oliver Findley two blue shirted dock hands, boxes on their shoulders, preceded a man moving with a skipping limp, holding his knee in place with one hand.

Oliver Findley advanced, coming up the concrete approach beyond the freight offices. The doors of the first boxcar were open on the loading platform. The two blue shirted men stepped in and eased down the boxes. The man with the limp stood dumbly, looking about him. Finally he too went in and sat down on one of the boxes.

Oliver Findley moved up, interested. No one

paid any attention to him, so he leaned on the jamb and said: "Going up the line, señor?"

The man on the box raised his eyes and looked at him. Said "Yes," and lowered them again.

"Going to take charge of Central Chicago while Mr. Stellow is away, I suppose," guessed Oliver Findley, nodding.

The man did not answer. Oliver Findley twitched the corners of his eyes and glanced about. After a moment he said, "And where is the other one going?"

The man looked up slowly. "I am Quintín Mederos, señor, and I am doing what Mr. Stellow tells me. I do not know about any other one."

"I mean," said Oliver Findley, "your friend in the box." He gestured toward the far corner of the car.

Quintín Mederos' eyes followed his hand, blinked, and fixed themselves.

"Something died?" inquired Oliver Findley, stepping into the door. "Slight odor of mortality?" He began to laugh and Quintín stood up. Oliver Findley bent double with laughter.

The man with the limp heaved himself to the far side of the car. He clutched the opposite door jamb, swung out, tried to let himself down, and fell.

Oliver Findley jumped and looked after him.

Quintín had landed on his face on the cinders. He got up now and began to run, skipping frantically along the line of halted box cars. Oliver Findley dropped down and trotted after him. He was so weak with a laughter, inspired he knew not how, that he did not go very fast. Quintín, coming to the last car, pried the door open and struggled grotesquely in as Oliver Findley came up.

Quintín Mederos limped across the floor to the back and sank down, pressing his head into the angle. Oliver Findley put his hands on the door sill, raised himself on his toes and looked.

"Slight odor of mortality?" he asked. "Trace of corruption, señor?"

He got no answer, so finally, still laughing, he turned away, moving around the end of the car and across the track. Walking slowly in the first shadows, he saw Mr. Stellow coming from the freight offices.

"Well, Findley," said Mr. Stellow, "I'll be wanting you soon."

"Yes, sir," acknowledged Oliver Findley. "I was going to tell you that if you were looking for a lame man, he's hiding in the last car."

"Making trouble again, Findley?"

"No, sir. I just showed him your memento mori down in front. It upset him."

Mr. Stellow nodded.

"I do not think there was any reason for you to do that," he said.

"Neither do I," agreed Oliver Findley. "Only I felt like it. There seemed to be something wrong with him."

"Probably there was," said Mr. Stellow. "I was trying to help him out."

"Whether it is easier," Oliver Findley said, "to say, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee,' or to say, 'Rise up and walk.'"

"Go on back, Findley," said Mr. Stellow. "You'd better have another drink."

• 4 •

OLIVER FINDLEY supposed it was an hour later. He had his back to the café doors but in the mirror over the bar he could see the reflected night. People came out of it, passed through the radiance falling from the café, disappeared into it again.

The mirror made a liquid oblong like a pool below the tacked-up advertisements of cigarettes and little faded Cuban flags.

Oliver Findley had passed the stimulated stage when it amused him to frighten the lame man on the train. Now it was a numbness, a time-destroying inertia. There was no need to do anything. One did not even need to think anything. Nothing existed any more, either to interest him or hurt him. He stopped drinking at this point. No reason advanced itself for raising a glass.

Cipriano watched furtively, disturbed by the look in his solitary patron's eyes. Not dull and unseeing like a man in a stupor, neither were they natural. Cipriano hoped that nothing would happen, for he had sold him much more liquor than he was supposed to serve any one person. With Mr. Stellow at the terminal there might be trouble for Cipriano if anything happened. The fat man tried to assure himself that this gentleman was perfectly orderly, and if drunk, not disagreeable about it. Cipriano was concerned, none the less, when he saw Mr. Stellow come out of the dark and stand in the door.

Cipriano grinned uneasily and murmured, "Good evening, señor."

He licked his lips and busied himself polishing glasses, watching the Administrator move

through the tables and drop a hand on the slouching gentleman's shoulder.

Mr. Stellow looked toward the bar. Cipriano winced, but the Administrator said only, "Bring me a brandy and soda."

Mr. Stellow sat down.

Oliver Findley roused himself. It was like stepping again into his stream of consciousness which had been passing him steadily, a little to one side. He looked at the Administrator and smiled, for suddenly he knew he liked Mr. Stellow. Not so much as a person, as for the solidity, the integrity of his whole being. It was similar to the indefinable repose, the sense of well-being which went with powerful animals; a big muscled dray-horse; a half-ton bull standing quiet. Oliver Findley laughed. "I was thinking that you were like a horse," he said.

Mr. Stellow smiled back at him. That was astounding. Never, he realized, had he seen Mr. Stellow smile before. It was gone instantly. A betraying flash of unexpected happiness. Oliver Findley thought: he's happy because he has got things fixed up. He was intensely curious as to the intricate meaning of all this—Monaga, Stellow. What bond there could be between them; what concern it was of the Administrator's.

"A slight odor of mortality," sighed Oliver

Findley. "Well, I'm sorry to have frightened your lame man, Mr. Stellow."

Cipriano brought the Administrator's drink, waddling fast, straining his ears. Mr. Stellow gave him a look. Setting down the glass, he retreated just as precipitately. "It happened," said Mr. Stellow, "that the priest was sending up to Sancti Spíritus the body of a woman Mederos knew."

"He wasn't very devoted in death," observed Oliver Findley. "And yet I wouldn't think he had many women."

"You don't make allowances for other people's shortcomings," said Mr. Stellow. "Sometimes I think you forget to make allowances for your own, Findley."

"If you're talking about Habana," said Oliver Findley, "I know that I'm not going. Something slipped. I could feel that. Besides, it was just an idea I had for a while, Mr. Stellow. Since then I saw that it wouldn't be any use. I've tried about everything, Mr. Stellow. I guess I'm tired of things. What are that Monaga man's shortcomings that you are working so hard to make allowances for?"

He knew even while he said it that Mr. Stellow would not answer that. Perhaps there wasn't an answer. More probably, he thought with tortuous

insight, the allowances were for the Administrator's own short-comings, so he added: "Or do you just get sick of being God, Mr. Stellow?"

Mr. Stellow said, "Findley, I wish I could do something for you, but I don't see how I can."

Oliver Findley looked at him, instinctively speculative.

After all, there would be no use in that.

"Everything's done as far as I'm concerned," said Oliver Findley. "I'll tell you, since probably you'll never find it out any other way, that it isn't so bad. Nothing is too bad when it has happened."

"No?"

"When you don't want anything, you don't miss anything, sir."

"Well, I hope you won't miss your liquor on the boat," said Mr. Stellow.

• 5 •

THE vast interior of the wharf was silent tonight, for the sugar boat was loaded. Cranes were hooded about their controls. In one far

corner the small electric trucks made a solemn regiment. From under the roof flood lights dropped down six mighty funnels of radiance, overlapping on the concrete floor. A string of empty freight cars stood like toys in the white shafts falling so far.

Oliver Findley and Mr. Stellow passed the guards at the entrance and walked into the emptiness alone. There was a single yellow bulb burning over the small door, left open, showing the canvas-sided tilt of a gang plank pointed up to the low waist of the steamer.

A slight sea breeze invaded the long office at the end. On the bench against the railed enclosure which set apart the rows of empty desks, waited Fray Alejandro. His eyes were puffy, almost shut. He passed the crude wooden beads of his rosary methodically through his blunt fingers.

"I think we can settle this matter now," said the Administrator. "Señorita Monaga?"

"She is waiting for me, señor."

"You made arrangements about the Hervas woman's body?"

"Yes, señor. I telegraphed as you kindly allowed me. I am very grateful to the Company

for its generosity." Fray Alejandro gazed at him mutely.

"You will do what you think best about señorita Monaga. As a personal favor to me, you will consider the whole Monaga case concluded. I may rely on your discretion?"

Fray Alejandro sighed. "Yes, señor," he nodded.

"There is nothing else you want?"

"No, señor," answered Fray Alejandro. He hesitated. "Well, I will go now, if I may, señor."

"Yes. That will be all."

His sandals shuffled heavily across the floor and the door swung after him.

"What did you do about the Monaga girl?" inquired Oliver Findley. "If you don't mind telling me, that is."

"Nothing. She talked to the Alcalde. The Alcalde is afraid of you, Findley."

"For that, I suppose you let him go on being Alcalde. That ought to keep him quiet."

"He will keep quiet," agreed Mr. Stellow. The electric light fell on his face, tired under the tan, bringing out the lines slanting down toward his mouth. "Rijo thinks you're the Devil, Findley."

"Not a bad idea," nodded Oliver Findley, amused. "What do you think, sir?"

"I haven't given it much thought," said Mr. Stellow. "Well, Findley, you can go, too. Just go on board. Everything is arranged."

He held out his hand. "I won't see you again, Findley."

"Good-by, Mr. Stellow. It's—" Oliver Findley shrugged. "Been so pleasant to have known you," he finished.

"I guess not," said Mr. Stellow. "Good-by."

Oliver Findley went out, down across the vast floor of the wharf, lighted like an empty stage, to the little door. He was outside then. Stars overhead and the steep flank of the steamer in front of him. He turned, hesitant, not wishing to go on board yet, walking slowly up the narrow footway edging the great shed of the pier. Down toward the end was an oblong of light. A window was open behind the screen and he moved toward it, incurious. It was Mr. Stellow speaking that made him halt. He stood close to the window, against the side of the wharf, leaning his head back and looking at the stars.

Fray Alejandro was hearing Nida's confession, fighting off his dreadful weariness, troubled

whether he had done right about Mr. Stellow and Vidal. At least he had done all he could, all the Company would let him. That was nothing, but he did not doubt that God would understand, would take care of Vidal, would take care of him.

Nida went forward deliberately to enumerate the faults which she remembered especially.

No hurtarás. . . .

Well, she had stolen several things. She had taken Osmundo's money, but she had put it back.

In fact it was still there, waiting.

Fray Alejandro stiffened his neck to hold up his sagging head.

No fornicarás. . . .

"And, Father," she said humbly, "I have been impure. . . ."

Dr. Palacios sat in his office writing in the records from his case book.

Hervas, Cuchita,

His pen dropped from blank space to blank space.

Sex. Female. Age. 65 circa.

None of the older people were very sure when they were born, for registration and records had come only with the United Sugar Company. He wrote on.

Finally, looking at his notes, he saw the scribbled “arsenic poisoning?”

He glanced a moment at the sheet he had finished before this. *Monaga, Osmundo.* Cause of death. *Accidental drowning.*

He shrugged, dipped his pen into the ink, and wrote now, *acute indigestion.*

Into the room where Vidal Monaga sat, Mr. Stellow came and closed the door.

Vidal looked at him as though he had been gone only a few minutes. He inclined his calm bearded head and said, “Good evening, Mr. Stellow.”

• 6 •

“GOOD evening, Mr. Stellow.”

Oliver Findley watched the stars. He was going away from the stars, for they were never seen like that in France. Never a moon like the Caribbean moon; never any sun, like the hot sun on the islands. He saw Paris moist under the rain and the provincial river valleys full of mist.

"Good evening, my friend," said Mr. Stellow.

The swift "mi amigo" was fraught, passing Oliver Findley into the night, with some faithful firmness. The Administrator's voice offered something of himself, as though the heart had hands to be held out and taken. What, wondered Oliver Findley, still gazing at the stars, shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor. . . .

He heard the creak of them sitting down; the calm of their unhurried silence was almost audible. Friendship between these two, Oliver Findley guessed, must have been such a friendship, a silence of understanding. At once more came to him, more of the meaning that he had found missing until now. With the elimination of words and the complications which spent their uneasiness in speech the discrepancy disappeared. A bond of simple humanity joined them, each intent on his different ends, each living his separate life by his individual view of things. They felt no need to exchange explanations or find phrases for their experience.

Mr. Stellow said, "I think everything is settled now."

Vidal Monaga said, "Good."

All my life I have talked too much, thought

Oliver Findley. Had he the time or the desire to take it, perhaps, at this last, he would be able to see how everything that had happened to him happened simply because words were too easy.

"You are released from the Alcalde's order of arrest," said Mr. Stellow. "The matter is officially closed."

It had never, reflected Oliver Findley, been open. Never in Mr. Stellow's mind, could it have been possible to allow the mechanical processes to grind up the simple stone of this old man. It went farther than that, no doubt. The wordless bond silently and invisibly held them too close. Such destruction would break down something of Mr. Stellow. Some saving faith.

Oliver Findley thought of it, seeing clearly now, moved more than he would have thought possible. He saw too, the transparent farce of it. Mr. Stellow setting up himself against himself. Driving the mills and railroads on one hand, covering the face of the machines with the fiction of this necessary illusion on the other, sustaining futilely the legend of man and his dignity and freedom, long after the last remnants were dust under the revolving wheels.

Oliver Findley had a sweeping sense of dread-

ful things about to happen. He could almost have cried out, "Keep still, keep still!"

In the electric lighted room Vidal Monaga said, "No, señor."

There came the silence back. No sound of water for the night was too still. The stars were still also in heavenly pattern above the vast dim roofs.

Vidal Monaga spoke again: "That I could not do, señor."

His voice was troubled, as though his heart were troubled too, that Mr. Stellow had not understood him.

After a while he went on: "It is not much to be a Monaga to any one but me, señor. But I will be turned over to the authorities, please."

"Because of justice, señor," he explained reluctantly.

Finally Mr. Stellow answered: "As you wish."

Oliver Findley turned from the side of the window and began to laugh. It was almost soundless. Profound. Tearing at him.

Oliver Findley moved unsteadily, walking away.

The mounting mirth of it surged over him; the laughter of the heart seeing the great joke of

the machine; the machine's inhuman beauty, the reason and might of the machine, confounded so inevitably by the rooted folly, the poor stubborn pride of man.

Under the arc-light, the white canvas side of the gang plank was lettered exactly *United Sugar Company*. Oliver Findley looked at it and laughed out loud. He stepped from rib to rib on the slow slant, laughing more and stumbling occasionally.

On the deck a man watched him, his hands in his pockets, gilt letters reading Second Officer on his cap.

He thought Oliver Findley was unnecessarily drunk. He looked at him with rigid contempt. His straight, tightened lips opened and he said coldly: "There is a place prepared for you."

THE END

[illegible]

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